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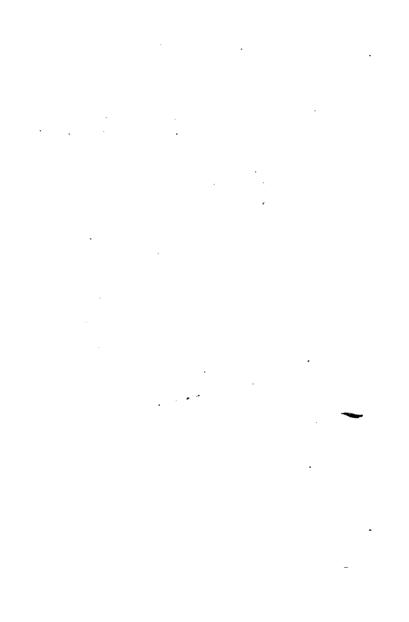
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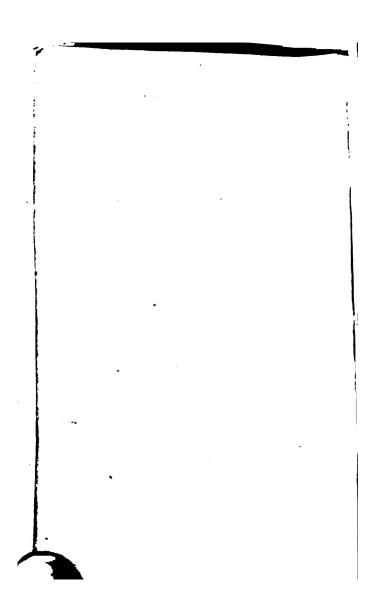
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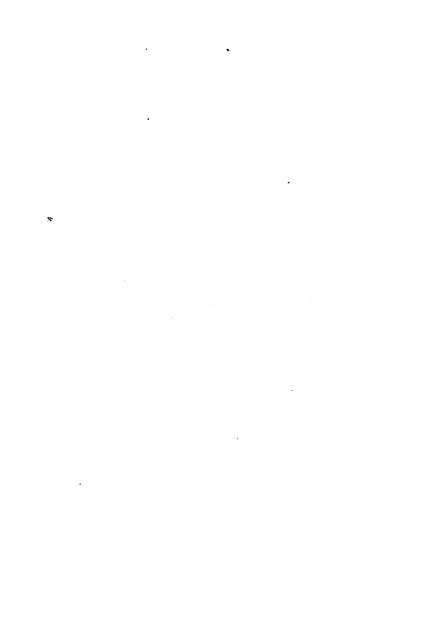


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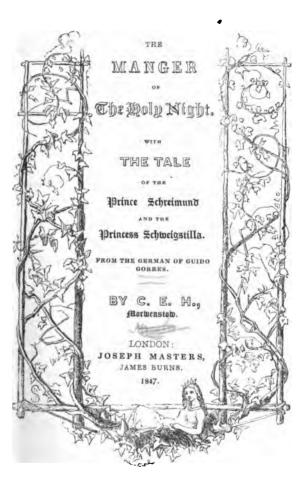
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Ir was the Vigil of Christmas-day, that blessed tide, when "to us a Child was born." Cold was the night, for Winter had arrayed the casement with her flowers of frost, deep snow had shrouded both field and city, and the leafless branches of the trees bent low beneath their burden towards the earth. The brook aforetime so loud and so strong, flowed slowly

and in silence beneath the ice, as though its waters were dead; the birds, still hungry, crouched among the leaves, and the shadows of evening gradually darkened over the wintry scene.

With my mantle folded around me, I went forth into the air; a keen and angry wind moaned along the sky: the tokens of life were few in the solitary streets: they who sate by the hearth lingered there long, and the stragglers in the city made haste to the homeward fire. I went away from the habitations of men, and passed onwards and on. The children of the poor met me at the gate, for they sung sweet carols that night, and asked an alms from door to door.

I had gone through the gate and along the pathway by the brook towards the hills; a sledge glided home with its lightning speed, and its sound scared the raven from her rest, so that she shrieked and soared into the air from the old oak tree. Then all things were still. I was alone, and as far as the eye could

reach, around me was a wild and wintry plain, all desolate, soundless, frozen, dead.

I wrapped myself closer in my mantle, and mused in deep thought on the days of the first-born Christmas-tide: and lo, the former world, which waited for MESSIAS arose, and stood before me. It was like that gloomy snow-clad plain. A winter was on the earth, and the heavens, shut up and bleak, were darkened with the shadows of death. Men's hearts were dead, the love of many had grown cold, and very hope was witheredaway. They fed on ashes; they languished with that unutterable thirst which no perishable pleasure of this world could quench or allay: they hungered for the Bread of Life. Death was to them a meal of fire. They panted for deliverance and for redemption; for the feet of cruel tyrants were on their necks, and they bowed down their backs for the oppressor to pass over.

I listened, and I heard the sighs of the ancient Seers of Zion. I saw them as they sate clothed in sackcloth and ashes, each bright prophetic eye turned towards the Invisible sun, and they lifted up their hands and poured forth the language of supernatural song. The dews of heaven fell on the righteous in the night; the shepherds, by the willows of Jordan, they appeared to me in vision, forgetful of the flock and herd, their thoughts swallowed up in remembrance of the storied past, or in anxious hope for the Day of the Dove, with the leaf of olive in her mouth. Then saw I on a lofty tower the Sages of the East; they waited with Vigil and watch and with many a votive prayer for the Star which had tarried such long long years to beam out in the sky. At last a dim faint radiance reddens among the clouds, the vail of the heavens is by slow degrees lifted up, and there, in the vast immeasurable sky, it gleams in the form and fashion of a golden, starry Cross, the Lamp of the Anointed. They see it, for it shines. through their tears, and with foreheads bowed and bare, they hail with the Song of the Son of Beor the Signal of Salvation! And now,

behold before me Bethlehem in the land of Judah. There was the stall, the blameless mother, she knelt in lowly worship, with dutiful love, beside the Manger of her Son; and there He lay, a Child among the Poor, the Lamb of Gop! the King of Heaven! Around them oxen kneel, and the Son has turned upon the Mother such a look of heavenly love that her countenance is bright and gleaming. Then heard they over that place the voices of the Angels as they chanted the mystic melody they had learned in Heaven, and gradually the sounds of the lowly and the poor of this world mingled with that lofty strain; for the Shepherds entered in, and knelt, and worshipped the Young Child! Light supernatural had filled the stall, and the Signal-Star came in and stood as though with life, over the spot where a virgin folded a Babe to her thrilling breast. The stately footsteps of the camel and the horse were heard at the door, and see! they enter, in their royal array, the awful Three—the inspired Magi of the land of the morning—the. Wise Men of the East,—stern, solemn, old, and they bow down their faces to the earth, to offer the first-fruits of the homage of the nations — Gold to the King — Frankincense to the Gop — and Myrrh to the Victim, for it was the balsam of death. This, then, was the first-born Christmas-tide; and the light which filled that place, I beheld it, for it gushed as from a fountain, and flowed in its courses from one generation to another! and that psalmody of the Angels, and the song of the shepherdmen, I heard them, for they were blended from age to age in the palace of the king and the cottage of the poor, to hail and welcome the Child on the vigil of His birth.

Thus came I in deep thought to the borders of the forest. The dark wall of the trees stood before me in my path, and aroused me from my dream. I turned towards the city, but again the solemn and soundless night, only broken ever and anon by some far-away chime, brought back upon my soul the visions of the

past. I stood once more beside the manger at Bethlehem, and my spirit went forth in thought as along some mighty stream from land to land and from people to people, who held in their generation this festival of joy. I journeyed from Jerusalem to Rome. In the gloom and silence of the catacombs they were gathered together-the first of the faithful, the earliest Church of the seven-hilled city. The vaults were dark, and damp, and cold; tomb upon tomb had been hewn out of the rock on the right hand and the left. But these were the blessed companies of the persecuted race; they bare in silence and in tears the sacred bodies of the saints to the grave; the faint light of a solitary torch falls on the cold pale faces of the dead. Lilies and branches of palm were laid upon the bier, and though they have purple wounds their calm and placid faces seem to prophesy that their death was sweet. There knelt many a child of the house banished from the love and kindness of their fathers' home. There worshipped Saint Agnes music of Cecilia's voice, and thus the Church prevailed. The life of her children, exile, and oppression, and grief. Their death, a refuge and a gain. Their tears glittered in the Christmas light; but they "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, out of weakness were made strong, of whom the world was not worthy."

Again in dreams I saw the Eternal City; but centuries had passed away; a great and mighty change had come upon the land. Instead of the Place of Sepulchres there was a fair and stately dome, over the graves of the Martyrs there were arches graceful and tall; pillars and columns shone along the aisles as bright as burnished brass; lamps of silver and of gold burned before the pictures of those Saints whose reliques had been carried to the grave in silent tears; and many a noble Cross lifted up its head in the broad clear light of

day! Clouds of fragrance filled the sanctuary: the chant of the Angels' and the Shepherds' hymn mingled along the wall: white-robed Priests proceed towards the altar, their garments gleamy with gems and gold; and in their midst they bear in a casket, clear as crystal, the Manger of Bethlehem. All kneel, and the voice of an aged solitary man breathes upon the multitudes the blessed name of the Child JESUS. Again, another change! The scene was in a rocky glen of the Appenines. I was at Rieti in the night; thick darkness was upon the valley and hill; but all at once a thousand torches gleamed among the rocks, the voices of the shepherds chanted the Christmas Psalm, and the Brothers of Saint Francis, with their founder at their head, approached in lengthened line to celebrate, in humble lowliness, the birthtime of the LORD. They found the stall of Bethlehem that night in a valley of rocks surrounded by lofty trees, straw was spread upon the ground, in their midst the ox and the ass lay down; and there

built they an altar in shape as the manger of old. The saint himself offered the sacrifice; he, too, raised the psalm and chanted the Gospel of the Holy Child. Then did he pour forth in melody the grace of his lips. He rehearsed the history of the Lowly One Who had not where to lay His head: he told them of the Mother and the Son, the place, the time, the witnesses, the star, until that solitude was peopled to their eyes with the scenery of old; they saw the manger and the Child, the sages and the shepherd-men, and they heard them call Him Jesus.

But they faded from my sight: I lifted up mine eyes, and lo! along the sky there was revealed to me, as in some storied picture of the past, the Christian kingdoms of the earth. The dominions of the twelve kings; Greek and Italian, and Frank, English, Saxon, and Dane. There were churches many and large: towers in multitude, and stately spires, and in every one of them on the same night there was celebration with prayer, and psalm, and in-

cense, of Bethlehem Ephrata, the village that was once so little among the thousands of Judah.

The vision fled, and now I looked along the lands on the dwellings of the lowly and poor, and ever and anon there was a roof of straw. a casement narrow and low; but its light fell upon a solitary image on the wall, of the blessed Mother and her Child, and forms clad in the weeds of poverty sung welcome to their Christmas-night with songs of thanksgiving. Again, I went in the spirit through an Alpine valley, between rifted and snowy hills; there were the shepherds of the mountains among the hills, and the Lamb of the tribe of Judah sounded in their psalm. A plain was spread before me, and on the right hand and on the left there were villages of peasant-men. shouted with joy, for it was the Feast of the Mighty Birth, and their voices had poured forth upon the ear of night, sweet echoes of the Angels' song:

Thus did my soul hear the hearts of many

people beat with gladness, whole centuries of time. I returned towards the city. Before my feet the white walls of the churchyard were shining in the moon; I entered by the gate and stood among the houses of the dead: it was the very realm of death, and silence, and night. But soon it seemed as though even here there was a breath which so breathed upon the dry bones, that they lived. There was an added grave before me, a hillock not yet green; I stood, and as I listened there came up as it were a voice out of the ground, and sung—

Come ye! the rescue greet,

The fruit of Jesu's birth,

Cast ye your hearts beneath His feet,

The Ruler of the earth.

Bring homage to the Child,

The Son of Mary's care;

Breathe, until He is reconciled,

Your sorrow, and your prayer!

Gifts! for the Son of Heaven!

The myrrh, that sign of sin;

Hearts, that are fain to be forgiven,

And crowns, with thorn within!

Come ye, and let us kneel,
This vigil of His birth;
Love like His own, O! sinner, feel,
For all who weep on earth!

I went on, and stood at another grave. The breath of a voice was there also; but its sound was deep, stern, and strong, like the clang of echoing steel on some silvery shield.

Far in the East, this day there smiled, The bright brow of a glorious Child; Star of the mighty and the brave! I hail Thee from my warrior-grave!

The garlands of Heaven to the spirits who sung! was my votive prayer; I went from the place of their rest, for not far off there gleamed a soft mild light. I stood by it, and listened,

and I heard a sad and thrilling melody, like the voice of some angel who pined for the light of Heaven.

Far in the East behold,

The mountain shadows roll;

And lo, the scenery of old,

Comes back upon my soul.

When once again on earth there trod,

Man in the image of his God!

He came—He comes on earth—
The everlasting Child;
He visits on His day of birth,
The race He reconciled.
You light along the evening skies,
Flashed from unseen ethereal eyes.

He giveth, as He gave,
Life to the lonely dead;
This night, by voices from the grave,
The prayers of earth are said.
We long to wake from this deep dream,
As the hart panteth for the stream!

Again, I stood by the gate, and "O, LORD,

give them eternal rest," was the language of my prayer. I made haste towards the city; in my way there was a solitary dwelling. Now I had called to mind that three days agone a poor man had been carried out from that door, dead. There was a dim light through the casement, which came from the lamp of the image. I saw within the room the widow in her weeds, as she sate before the niche where the Virgin-Mother stretched forth her hands upon her Child, and smiled in stone. The woman was pale, and wasted, and worn; but she soothed her babe to sleep, and sung—

She wandered through the city,
A lonely poor man's child;
The hardest heart would pity,
That face so sad and mild.

She heard the joy of voices,

For they kept their Christmas-tide;
But o'er that girl rejoices,

Her God, and none beside.

It had pleased the Lord to gather
Her parents to their rest;
Her mother and her father,
And all who loved her best.

She saw them gaily bringing, Gifts for the Christmas-tree; She heard sweet children singing, But lone and sad was she!

"Alas!" she cried, "I only,
Am shut out from their mirth;
O, why am I so lonely?
Thou SAVIOUR of the earth!"

Behold! her hands she raises,
With wonder and affright!
On a fair strange child she gazes,
Clothed as in robes of light!

"I was, like thee, a stranger,
A solitary birth;
I have gone through childhood's danger,
And sorrows of the earth!

"My name is Jesus! yonder Those starry branches see; No longer, lonely, wander, It is thy Christmas-tree!"

Then came an angel, gladly,
Forth from the silvery leaves;
Down, where the maiden sadly,
Among the joyful, grieves.

"Seek, thou," he said, "none other, Thou wanderer of the wild; Thy father, and thy mother, Is Jesus, Mary's Child!"

This song was chanted by a mournful mother to her dying child, insomuch, that how, I know not, my mind went back to the catacombs of the early believers again, and I thought that this wide world after all is but a succession of graves. I entered within the city, and urged my way through the busy multitude, who made merry among the crowded booths of the Christmas fair. Who, thought

I, among them heeds the misery of that weeping mother, with her sorrowful song? I entered a quiet street, and came to a rich man's house: a voice from within bade me to the feast. There shone in the hall a lofty Christmas tree, arrayed with jewels and lamps; underneath its boughs was the mimic manger; within, on a mossy bed, lay an image of the Child Jesus: the children gazed on it with awe and love, and the psalm re-echoed around.

On a sudden two children came in, who were fatherless and poor; they had been sent for to share that feast, but the light dazzled their eyes, and their hearts, unused to gladness, trembled at the scene. They stood hand in hand before the Manger, and they cast down their eyes, and sung—

Who in that Manger lies,
With glances like the dove?
The light of those young eyes,
Was kindled from above!

What mother kneeleth there,
With brow so meekly bent?
Tis Mary, mild and fair,
The maiden innocent!

That Hebrew, bent in prayer, Is Joseph, Mary's guide; Sent like a shepherd there, To watch by JESU's side.

And, lo! the oxen kneel,
And look with loving eyes;
They know their LORD, and feel
Once more in Paradise!

Harken! what thrilling sound!
And see! what silvery light!
The angels breathe around,
The air with God is bright.

Shout! to this lowly stall,

Let praise this night be given;
"Tis JESU's festival,

The feast they hail in heaven!

The children ended their song: and their rich companions came and put on them white chrysoms, and filled with gifts their hands. They were silent, for their hearts were too full to speak, save a lowly word of thanksgiving.

The Feast went on, and the children of the house glided to and fro with quick and joyful feet, and gazed on the ornaments of the hall with a loud delight. At last above the picture of the Stall, they found The Christmas Rod. It was smooth and fair to look upon, and placed above the Manger in the bough; so they would have it taken down and placed it in their hands. But when they saw that the shining hand which was bound to the Rod was neither jewel nor gem, but only carved from some red wood of the forest, those children were displeased, and demanded wherefore such a common and unlovely thing had been hung upon that bough? Then said I, the saying is old-

[&]quot;The Christmas Rod this proverb tells,
That pleasant fruits have rugged shells."

"Tell us then," said they, "who made this custom first, and why hath this Rod been brought to vex us in the midst of our joy?" you know," was my answer, "who was the man who first bound the Rod upon the tree? was wise in his generation, and well knew what he did." "But who taught him to do it," they inquired, "and where did he live and die? and had he children? and how many?" "Hush, said I, "cease from these questions-heard you not the clock? It is the hour of prime, and I must away." But they held me with their hands, and besought me to promise that they should hear next day the history of the Rod. Then went I forth from that hall with its mirth of happy children, to seek the solemn silence of the Church.

Once more they chanted along the aisles the legend of the awful Child: the lay that had floated through the lips of so many generations. Prostrate on the ground the people prayed, and among them I besought God that He would grant me the heart and mind of a little child. The Service ceased: gradually the lamps had gone out one by one: the Sacristan with his keys was at the gate; and I, too, went on my homeward way. The memory of my promise came back upon my mind, and earnestly did I search my thoughts, but in vain, for the source of that ancient usage, whereby they bind upon the tree at Christmas tide the Rod. Swallowed up in thought, I found myself at the gate of an ancient oratory. and within there was a figure and light. The form was that of a fair and stately maiden, with a countenance noble and calm: and she came towards me with eves lifted up towards Heaven, until at last she stood before me, and there came forth from her lips the breath of a low and thrilling voice which called me by my name, "Whither now roam thy thoughts?" she inquired. "I know thee well, and yet thou knowest me not: restless wanderer that thou art; thou, who wilt not leave the dead in peace; thou who gazest in at every window, and lookest on many men. I know thee with

thy thousand thoughts, and I have guided thy spirit in dreams: once, too, I led on his pilgrimage the mighty master of song: with me he passed through the thrilling regions of penitence and love; and at my side he ascended and went up to the native land of far ethereal light, where the pure and the blessed of their FATHER see God and live. I know, moreover, thy thoughts: the tree, the rod, the promise, and the forgotten tale. But there should nothing sorrow on this blessed night. Take then and read this roll." It was of parchment white as snow, and it was written from the top to the bottom, with letters of starry gold, that shone throughout that shadowy cell. I took from her the roll, and read thereon its name. "The History of the Brince Behreimund and the Brincess Behweigstilla." I unrolled it and I read the title of the first chapter, which was, "A PLEASURE GARDEN AND A MELANCHOLY KING." I looked up to thank the giver, but she had vanished out of sight. I was in silent darkness, and alone; but the

white roll was in my hand: and after I had waited long, to see that graceful form once more, I sought again my home, and laid me down to sleep. But there was for me neither slumber nor rest, until that I had read the Legend of the Rod. Its language filled my soul with rapture and delight; and when I had come to the end, I languished for more words.

Fair Jesu, Mary's child,
Breathe on us Thy sweet breath,
So in Thine Image mild,
Shall we arise from death.

I slept, and was roused from my dreams, by a loud and thrilling sound. It was the echo of the sacred bells as they chimed in Christmas Day. I sought for the roll, but like the hands that wrote its words, it had vanished away; so that I could only rehearse to the children of the house the faint and faded remembrances of that which I had read. He who would learn more, let him seek it (and would that he may find it!) from Our Lady of Good Help, in her ancient and solitary shrine.

The Wistory

of

The Prince Schreimund

and

The Princess Schweigstilla.



CHAPTER I.

A Pleasure Garden, and a Melancholy Tale.

ONCE upon a time there was a king who went out very early in the morning, to walk in his pleasance. The place was lovely and fair to the eye; but the king had been a long time sick, and so ill that he wist not what to do.

That garden blushed with beauty like a bride: the flowers breathed sweet incense, and the rays of the morning sun trembled in the dewdrops of the grass: every tree shone like some Christmas bower, but the heart of the king was sad within him, and he trod along those paths of loveliness in silent sorrow. There were many precious fruits which laughed before him upon the boughs in hues of purple and gold: the water gushed in music from the fount: fair and silvery fishes bounded in the pool: the silent shadows of the swan glided along the stream: but the very perfume of the garden was to the king as it were the smell of death. He loathed the ruddy fruits. and fled from the sight of his own image in the water as though it had been some ghastly shade. He rushed along the paths, and stood before a thicket of roses which fenced that garden on every side. There before him were the lambs that fed among the trees; and the hart and the hind that had grown up tame in the forest; and they bounded towards their master to seek their accustomed food, while the thousand voices of birds greeted him in silvery song. But the king smote away the deer, and sought to hush the birds to silence with his voice. But his threats were in vain. in vain also he stoned them with stones: they gathered in multitudes into the branches of an old and gnarled birch tree in the midst of that garden, and sung. Stone after stone did he hurl at them; and at last, in his fury, he flung among the branches, his royal sceptre and crown. His rage increased to madness, when he saw that these precious and kingly jewels had become entangled and hung upon the boughs. He cast himself upon the ground and lay thereon with his eyes fast closed, and his ears covered with his hands, that he might neither see sight, nor hear sound. "Woe is me," said the king, "in hall and bower mine is the same dull weary heavy weight of soulwhy, in the midst of all that makes others glad-O! why am I this living death?"



CHAPTER II.

Di a little Grap Man and his Strange Bream.

We know not how long the weary king lay beneath the tree, for none durst ever approach him in his solitude, tarry he ever so long. His crown and his sceptre troubled him no more, for they hung far up upon the boughs of that ancient tree. But after a while it appeared to him as though he heard a breath

and felt a gentle touch. He started up exceeding wroth, and saw with astonishment near him, a little old dark gray man, who leaned upon a mossy stone and slept. He was clad in a mantle of gray: his hair was white as snow: both hands held a staff: his old and weary head sunk deep between his arms, and his beard covered his face. The old man neither moved nor stirred, and but for a frequent loud-drawn breath, he might have been taken for a statue of stone or a corpse. The king looked on him in wrath, for all men had been forbidden to enter that pleasance on pain of death. He then called him with a loud and angry voice, but his slumber was so deep that he still slept on. Then the king caught him by the beard, and shook him with great violence thrice, saying, "Ha, mine ancient, awake!"

Then the old man with a deep sigh awoke: he lifted up his head and looked with a firm and sorrowful gaze upon the angry king, and said in a sad low chant: How many a sorrow shall they shed, That honour not the hoary head! Behold you dew upon the flower, The type of Mercy's blessed shower But blossoms in their icy grave, Are signs of hearts that will not save Therefore, O king, on old and poor, Be merciful for evermore!

"Why," said the old man, "why hast thou broken my sleep? Why didst thou take me by the beard? And why dost thou look on me in wrath? I know thee for a king who thou art, but knewest thou my dream here upon the stone, thou wouldst be more gracious than thou art." "Thine must have been a rare dream," said the king, "and thy spirit is soon satisfied under that mantle of thine, which has so often seen the sun rise and set upon it's folds; yet let me hear thy tale, it may soothe the weariness of my mind, and the heavy drag of the days as they pass over me in the bower Anything new, instead of this unand hall. varying song of birds, and ceaseless hum of bees, and selfsame hue of flowers, and these trees that bloom and fade with leaves ever and ever alike. Say then thy dream, and if it is a goodly one I will pardon thee and give thee moreover a reward."

Then said the old gray man; "Yesterday I was in the forest a wanderer, and hungry I came into thy garden for solace for food. from the fallen fruits and for rest. I cast myself down a-weary on this stone to sleep or die. Slowly the night and silence came on among the trees, and the sound of far-away waters soothed me to rest. I pondered on the coming twilight of my old man's life, and the darkness of the grave. I looked back upon the days of my youth, and the bright spots of childhood came forth one by one and shone along the midnight of memory like stars. Then came back to me the scenes that were gone. There was a vessel filled with the companions of my youth, and I was in the midst of them. The breeze was in the sails and there were banners in the air. A bower bent

above us, and amid the sounds of festival and song we glided down the stream. The bark moved onward and on, and the time sped like the river with invisible lapse. There were on the banks men who ate their bread in the sweat of their brow: there were shepherds with their flocks at their feet: there were nets and fishing-men: the sickle of the reaper shone among the sheaves; and the vats gushed with the blood of the vine. There, beside the forest, the hunter watched the prey. Scenes, too, of household life were there. The child on its path to the distant school, and the pilgrim, staff in hand, whose gaze was on the ancient oratory of the Lady of Heaven. But we heeded not these images of peaceful labour and humble existence. We glided on in dreamy rapture and reckless delight, as it were, feeding on flowers. Noon fled and solemn evening came. The reapers' task was done. nets were drawn to land, and the steward called the labourers and gave them their hire. and anon a chime came over the waters from

some distant tower of gray, that thrilled along the sky like the watchword of some sentinel in the armies of heaven. Then came dark night: the storm, the thunder, and the rain. But there was revelry in our midst and song. Then the wrath of the tempest waxed into madness. The waves arose, violent as though they had life. The ship reeled to and fro, until we looked forth upon the horrors of a wide and deadly sea. There were billows and a steep place, and the shore. I stood by the mast. I stretched forth my hands towards the rocks, and it seemed as though they beckoned to me to come. I plunged into the waves, the vessel was rent into fragments as I fell. A strong hand grasped me by the beard and I awoke, for it was thou, O king, who, with voice and gesture hadst roused me from my dream.

> Then be wise, O king, and fear, Thy voyage of the night is near; Very soon wilt thou lament, Shattered sail and rudder rent.

Yea, the crucible is on,
And the dross of life is gone:
Life behind and death before,
Angry wave and fatal shore!
Then be wise, O king, and see
Visions of eternity.
Sow pure seed in time to reap,
Gather good deeds to their heap;
Give thine alms to sick and poor,
Which the Judgment shall restore;
And thou shalt pass beneath the rod,
To the garden of thy GoD."

"Away with thy foolish dream," was the answer of the king, "and utter thy vanities to some other ear. Me thou knowest not, or thy song would have foretold to me heavenly joys rather than woe. Verily I believe that thou hast feigned this vision here in my garden, to force thy counsel on my ear. But I lack no charmer's voice; moreover, thy dream was none other than the old dull chime of the morning of youth, and the waters of time, and the sea of death, the grandame's tale to the weary child. Mark now my song.

"To thyself, old man, take heed,
Evil thought brings evil deed:
This is the moral of thy dream,
That thou'rt in danger on the stream!
Know that I loathe that wrinkled face,
And haste thee from this weary place;
Away! with proverbs in thy song,
Of time, even now to me too long;
Of alms to sick and poor! away,
Would I were happy now as they!
Thy vision with such griefs is fraught,
It breathes such loathsome themes of thought,
That if thou flee not from my gate,
This tree shall bear thy quivering weight!"

Thus said the king: but the old man went not away. He sate, unmoved, upon the stone, and looking on the king, without fear, he said, "Thou wilt not then listen to the warning of my dream, and thou hast no pity on my poverty, and hoary head; have compassion on me, then, for the sake of this old birch tree!"

"It is well," said the king, "thou puttest me in mind that I have for a long while been about to cut it down: at evening it shall fall, for that old and rugged tree is as much out of place among these rare and gracious flowers, as is an aged beggar in the garden of a king."

"Beware," said the old man, in a low, soft voice; "Sin not, O king, against that tree: thou hast to-day, in the blindness of thine anger, cast thy crown and sceptre from thee, take heed thou lose them not for ever: did not thy nurse sing to thee the legend of this tree; and how, by it, thy forefathers came to the throne? and how the founder of thy race held it in such honour, that he spread around it this pleasant place, and bequeathed his curse on him who should harm the tree?"

"Nay," said the king, "I have never heard the lay; wonder it has been why men suffered it here in the pleasance; when I have inquired, none could tell me why: but thou, for thou seemest well-nigh as aged as the tree, and thy beard is of the colour of its rind, thou mayest know, and if thou dost, say on; but

beware that thy tale is not so doleful as thy dream, or I will sing thee such a lullaby that thy next sleep shall be sound: for thou shalt awake no more!"





"Thou knowest not, then," said the dwarf, "the history of this tree, and how it was blended with the fortunes of thine house? I pity thee, O king, for if thy father had brought thee hither every day, and chastened thee with the rod, and rehearsed to thee the legend, its words would have touched thine heart, and life would not have been to thee

the wearisome thing that it is now; truth is bitter, like the leaves of this tree, and they who have fed upon the sweet words of the flatterer, are loth to listen to the language of reproof. Nevertheless, thou must be admonished while there is yet time; sit down, therefore, and hear."

The king listened with anger in his face, but as he much desired to know the tale, he sate down.

"Know, then," said the old man, "that this place, filled now with that stately castle, and this royal garden, was, in the days of my youth, a calm and grassy glade. Here and there stood a lofty tree, and beneath them bushes and reeds, sweet with the breath of flowers: but here, where now we sit, there was a small forest of birch, and in the midst there was a soft and silent spring. Now there dwelt by the quiet water a poor and solitary man, the father of a motherless child: their home was a hut framed from the woodland boughs, and its roof was of reeds, so that because

he lived alone in that copse, they called him 'The Old Man of the Wood.' This very tree stood at his door: the shadows of many an evening fell upon the man, as he sat with his lonely child, and thought upon that, which was ever in that solitude an anxious grief, the food of the next day. Thou, in thy majesty, O king, thinkest proud scorn of such a tree: but the branches of the birch were so precious to that poor man's heart, that he made solemn thanksgiving to God every day for their growth. He bound their twigs into brooms, which he sold that he might buy bread for himself and his son. The tree beside his door was, as it were, the token of his daily life, and moreover, it was dear to him because it was his own, and it was the only thing beside the but that he could so call. In the heat of the summer he watered it from the well, and he himself would rather lack water than that the tree should thirst: in the snow, and in the tempest, when the winter was fierce in the forest, even then he spared the tree of the

house, and went into the distant and dangerous wood for boughs. Thus grew the fair and silent companion of the poor man and his child; so nurtured, it prospered and prevailed, exceedingly. Its branches became the favourite bowers of many a sweet-singing bird, and they nestled among its leaves every spring: nay, so quiet was the place, and calm, that those wild inhabitants of the air approached without fear the poor man and his child, and it soothed them in their solitude to behold the love of birds, those beautiful images that came forth with wings from the mighty mind of God.

"Thus, then, went on their meek and harmless life—a strange and saddening scene—the old and solitary man, the tree, the birds, the child. The mother died the day that her son was born, and after her death the solitary father sat evening after evening beneath that leafy shade, and carried on his simple craft with the cradle of his child at his feet. Often and often he would mingle his voice with the song of the birch, and sing—

'Sleep, my baby, sleep!

The wolf will grasp the sheep,
Its soft skin to divide,
And rend its snowy side;
Sleep, my baby, sleep!

'The hunter seeks the wood,
There in the solitude,
The fatal shaft is sped,
And the fierce beast is dead!
Sleep, my baby, sleep!

'The vale and mountain's breast, Are soft with silent rest; And to the old oak tree, The dreamy shadows flee. Sleep, my baby, sleep!

'Lovely spirits there, In their robes of air, Weave, in hues of night, Visions of delight! Sleep, my baby, sleep! 'They bring, too, from the wild, Robes for the harmless child; They will fold them on my boy, And chant him songs of joy! Sleep, my baby, sleep!

'They only come in sleep,
When rest is calm in deep,
Then their bright presence gleams;
They talk to thee in dreams!
Sleep, my baby, sleep!

'See! his brow is bright,
With spirits of the night;
That smile upon his face,
Is from their embrace!
Sleep, my baby, sleep!'

"The child grew, a gentle and loving boy: the tree, the birds, the fountain, and the flowers, these were the dear and innocent companions of his youth; but his father had not always soothed him with sweet song. He had gathered from the birch a rod, and whensoever the child did wrong, if he injured bird,

fountain, or tree, or if he disobeyed his father's voice, then would the old man chasten him; nay more, it was the usage of the hut that the boy must kneel down and kiss the very rod of punishment; for his father said—

'Mark thee well, my gentle son,
That in love this thing is done:
For thee, this bitter rod was given,
By thy FATHER up in heaven!
He sees the danger thou art in,
From weakness, misery, and sin;
He saith, the right way to be trod,
Is to be made known by the rod:
I blame in love, I smite to save,
From pain and loss beyond the grave.'

"But the good old broom-binder had great trouble to print this on the mind of his son; and often after he had kissed the rod, he would grasp it and hurl it into the fire. Now there was nothing which the father had so strongly forbidden the child as to pierce the bark of the birchwood trees for their juice. He reckoned it in him a sin to requite the trees that had provided them so long with sustenance, by drawing from them, as it were, their blood of life. When, therefore the child thirsted, he led him to the fountain-side, and taught him this song:—

- 'See how bright and clear, my son,
 From this well the waters run;
 Earth's best and sweetest wine.
 Mark you not, how fair and free
 The tall oak's firm branches be,
 Where fresh fountains shine!
- 'Far, far away, its source was poured,
 Even from the river of the LORD,
 GOD cleaves the earth with streams.
 It shines beside the poor man's door,
 It gladdens him for evermore,
 Where its bright presence gleams!
- 'Here the sweet birds will come to drink, The hind will bend beside the brink, And start her imaged form to see, So clear the glassy waters be!'

"Thus dwelt they there, poor, but in peace; the years fled fast, the lad grew graceful and more tall, and on the hoar head of the father there had fallen a lighter gray. Now it came to pass, once on a day in spring, that the old man had to go into the forest for berries and for boughs; and before he went, he said, 'Give good heed, my son, that our chickens are sheltered from the birds of prey, and remember—

'If there come a weary guest,

Take him in, and give him rest!

Be thy greeting kind and strong,

'Welcome,' is the stranger's song!

'Bring him water, give him bread, As the ancient proverb said; If for only one thou hast, Fill thy brother's mouth, and fast.'

"Then went the father away, but he came back once more, and sharply charged the lad by no means to pierce the bark of their tree. The youth seated himself as soon as he was left alone, with his cross bow in his hand, to watch and ward against the birds of prey; and there he chanted, in low and mournful music, this lay:—

'Son of the forest wild am I!
And here in woods we dwell;
Here also did my mother die,
And find her narrow cell.
These boughs above her branches grieve,
And here we pray at morn and eve!
Dear art thou, calm and happy grove,
Thou wavest o'er the dust we love!

'Here song-birds glide in music by,
To seek their simple food;
They look on us with fearless eye,
Friends of our solitude!
And though in bleak and weary night,
Our hearthstone is the only light;
Dear art thou, calm and quiet grove,
Thou wavest o'er the dust we love!

The lonely birch tree murmurs here,
The wild bird soars along;
The fountain pours from year to year,
Her solitary song.
And yet this lone and dreary wood,
Hath treasures in her solitude!
Dear art thou, calm and happy grove,
Thou wavest o'er the dust we love!'

"Now, as the sun was going down, the youth beheld in the distance a stranger-knight, who came on, amid the shadows of the forest, stately upon his steed. Around his hunter's garb of green there was folded a fair mantle and a large, and he carried in his hand a golden spear. He rode on towards the hut, and there by the birchen tree he halted, and said, 'I have lost my road in the chase, and the darkness is falling fast; I will tarry in thy father's cottage tonight.'

"So he lighted down from his horse, and fastened him to a tree, and sat him down by the lad, and looked earnestly around; at last, 'I thirst,' said he, 'give me to drink, my child.'

"Then the lad arose and went towards the well, and filled a bowl of wood with those shining waters, and bare it to the stranger to drink; but he poured it on the ground with scorn. Then said the youth, 'My father told me that water was the wine of the rocks, and evermore he sings—

'Beside our well, the bounding roe
Will bend to drink: its waters flow
With fresh life for the birds of song;
Drink from the fountain and be strong!'

'Moreover we have none other thing wherewith thou mayest quench thy thirst.'

"Then turned the stranger towards the birchen grove, and, 'Pierce,' said he, 'this tree, that its sweet juice may yield me strength;' and forthwith he placed in the hands of the lad a keen and shining knife, and a cup of ruddy gold.

"But the boy would have nothing to do with

these, and made answer, 'When my father went hence he commanded me not to do this thing, and if, when he shall return, he finds that I have been disobedient to his voice, it will grieve him to the heart; drink, therefore, from the well.'

'Nay,' said the stranger, 'but from the tree. Behold this precious cup, pierce but the birch, and it shall be thine.'

"They stood beneath the birchen-boughs, and the knight held the golden chalice before the very eyes of the boy; but he saw, mirrored as it were in the gleaming gold, the ancient tree, and its image appeared like some shadowy token of his father's command. 'O, Sir,' said he, 'I will have none of it, thy words are words that I will not obey.'

"This answer deeply moved the anger of the knight; sternly he grasped the youth by the hair; held him between his knees, and with the knife at his breast, said, 'Either the blood of the birch or thine!'

"Then the courage of the lad gave way, and

he said, 'I will obey—spare but my life.' So the stranger gave him both cup and knife, and the boy went towards the ancient tree, trembling; he drew near, and he stretched forth his hand towards the stem, with the knife, to strike the tree: but it seemed to him as though the leaves shook, yet not with fear, and the voices of the birds appeared in his ears like the mournful accents of the dove when the cruel vulture hath robbed her of her young. 'Strike not,' he thought they sung, 'strike not, the blow will be in thy father's heart.'

"Then the youth withdrew his hand, and wept; he knelt before the stranger knight, and said, 'Have mercy on me, I must disobey thy command; rather let me bleed than the tree.'

"The knight gazed long in silence on the boy, took from him, without answer, the knife and the cup of gold, and all at once with his own hand he plunged the steel with his whole strength into the tree, and cut a wound in the bark, in the shape of the heart of a man, that he might drink."

Here paused the old gray man, and struck his staff against the tree, and said, "Thou didst doubt my dream, O king; but to show thee that this history of thine ancestor is no vision of the night, behold here upon the tree, scarred over with time, the very wound which the stranger made."

The king arose, and as the old man had said, so it was; he did not therefore as before revile the old man, but sat down again, silent and full of thought. Then thus went on the tale.

"It was night, and the aged broom-binder came home; he gave welcome to the stranger-guest, and divided with him his lowly food: but when he saw from the door, as the fire-light flashed from the hearth, a fresh wound in his favourite tree, he called to him in anger the lad, and bade him fall down on his knees. The youth looked towards the stranger, but he turned away his face. Then took the father into his hands a rod: the boy was silent; his father's wrath—the knife of the stranger-guest

—the remembrance that he had been taught the holiness of hospitality—these thoughts fettered his tongue. Then his father smote him three times, and said, 'The first stroke for disobedience, the second for self-control, and the third for memory.' Tears fell from the eyes of the lad on the roots of that ancient tree, and from the wound of every stroke there came a drop of silent blood. Then, strange to tell, among the boughs there was a song of birds, syllables, and a voice—

'No pearl that glitters in the deep,
Is like the tear the guiltless weep;
'Tis as the evening dew that flows,
Within the bosom of the rose!
And purer than the ruddy gold,
Is that which these sad boughs behold;
Lo! from the martyr-wounds of truth,
The blood of innocence and youth!'

"Then the old man, as his usage was, stretched forth the rod towards the lad, that he might kiss it, and he did so: when strange to tell, suddenly the stranger stood before him, and cast aside his mantle, and said to the old man—

'Behold, I am the king of this nation! I have travelled long in search of one meet to wear my crown: I have gone through forest and field, traversed mountain, valley, and hill: I have knocked at many a door, and many a a heart have I tried, but they all failed in the proof, until here amid this grove, in a hut of the forest, I have found a noble heart worthy of a kingly crown. This thy child hath learned to obey, therefore shall he rule: gold could not tempt him to transgress: the fear of steel did not cause him to err: he knows that sin and sorrow are born together, and are twin children of the earth.' And with these words the king drew the lad into his arms, and kissed him, and on the morrow he took him to his own home.

"The old man, too, embraced his child and wept; but he would not forsake the hut, or the forest, or the birchen tree; and this was

the farewell he uttered to his son—'Blessed be the tree, and the rod that grew thereon; it hath been changed into a royal sceptre; blessed shall they be evermore in my generations, for they have borne for their fruit a kingly crown!' Thus said the old man; and his son dwelt in the palace until the king died, who gave him his daughter in marriage, and with her his kingdom and crown.

"Great was the joy of the bridal-feast, and the old man of the hut was there: but soon yearned he for his cottage home, and thither again he went, for he said, 'A broom-binder was I born, and a broom-binder will I die; here in this grove, by my favourite tree among my gentle birds, I will pass the days that remain, and when I am dead thou shalt bury me beneath thy mother's cross, and plant flowers from the forest on my grave.'

"The old man lived long years in his solitude, and when he died they buried him by that cross, and planted there the flowers he had loved, and fed his birds by his grave. It

was the king, his son, that planted this stately pleasance around the birchwood tree; never did he forget the poverty of his father's house and the way whereby he came to a throne; he was a mild and righteous prince, and underneath his sway there was peace and gladness among the people of the land. At the last, when his death drew nigh, he sent for his son, and said, 'Thou knowest, my son, that all my greatness and all my power I owe to the old birch tree which stood at my father's door; thereon grew the rod that taught me obedience; be thou obedient also, and hear my last words, that my sceptre may remain with thy children's children for ever! Hold then that birch tree in honour; keep holy the hut of my father, in remembrance of our low degree, and the worship that GoD gave us, and as I have done, so do thou; go duly to the cross and to the grave of thy forefather, and there humbly pray: deck that cross evermore with flowers, and feed the birds by his grave. And now, behold these rods, no greater treasure can I bequeath to thee than they may be; their fruit is discipline, let them be signs to thee and thine; let every son of my lineage or ever he ascends the throne be smitten with these thrice; and let the cradles of every newborn child of our house be wreathed with fresh branches of the birch in memory of the hut, the forest, the lowly ancestor, and the trial tree! These were the last words of the king, and when he had so said he closed his eyes, and died.

"Thus then, thou hast heard, O king, the legend of thy race; hearken while I relate how the successors of that humble king dealt with his last commands. His son obeyed him well, but his son's son gradually suffered the ancient usages to fall into decay. They went to the cross and grave no more: the birds came to the grassy mound for food in vain: one by one the birchen trees were felled: the cross lay prostrate on the ground. Time and the tempest had destroyed the lowly hut, and the memory of the broom-binder faded away among

men. His race were kings born of kings, and they reckoned that their ancestry, like their lineage, had been royal. Nothing remained save this one tree which stood aforetime at the cottage-door; but the prophecy that regarded it had vanished clean out of mind. Yet if thou, O king! or ever thou didst hold sceptre or wear crown, hadst been smitten with the three stripes, thou wouldst have called to mind thine old forefather, and have spared my gray head for his sake. Take heed lest the fortunes of thine house should again change, and thy children become that which thine ancestor was."

Herewith the gray dwarf ended his tale: more he might have said, but for the fury of the king; his brow grew dark, and at the last words of the ancient man he could no longer withhold his wrath—"Away," said he, "prophet of evil! is it not enough that thou hast cast reproach on my forefathers, but wilt thou foretell disgrace for my children also? But take heed to thyself; thou hast threatened

my house with the rod, mark how death shall come to thee thyself from its scourge." Then the king put a small silver signal, that he wore in his breast, to his mouth, and blew thrice: and a crowd of servants rushed from the castle suddenly. "Take that old man," he shouted aloud; but behold, as he turned him around. the dwarf was gone, and the sceptre and the crown that had hung upon the boughs had vanished with him out of sight. East and west, and north and south, they sought the royal jewels and the old gray man, but they were found no more, to the great wrath of the furious king. Then wreaked he his anger on the loathsome tree. Ere the sun was set they cut it down, and around it they piled a vast heap of wood to feed the funeral fire of the old birch tree; and as the flame gathered around its boughs the king lifted up his hand with a solemn vow that no rod from such a stem should ever touch his royal race: and that whosoever in his kingdom should name broom-binder or birch, should suffer death.

Hardly had he uttered these words when they heard the warder's horn and the chime of joyful bells, and the king saw the servants of his queen approach in haste; then at once his wrath ceased, and he turned to hear their words.





"REJOICE! O king!" shouted aloud the servants as they came; "that which thou hast so long prayed for is at last fulfilled, and that twofold. God hath granted unto thy

queen a daughter and a son!" Then made he haste to the castle, and the queen held out to him in her arms, his children. Sweet was their smile when they looked on him, and the shrill echo of their cry was music in his ears: nay even he too smiled, the melancholy king, and in the joy of his heart he held high festival, and gathered his people together to rejoice with him, and to kiss the small hands of his little children. Again in that assembly he repeated his oath of the garden, and he caused it to be made known that on pain of his displeasure, none should ever thwart the will of his children all their life long. So those children grew up, nurtured in pride and pleasure, and the rod of the tree was to them a name unknown. The prince had dark hair and a nose curved like the eagle, and his voice was so loud and strong that his mother named him Prince Schreimund. His sister on the other hand had long light hair, a small straight nose, and a soft and thrilling voice, and her mother called her Schweigstilla, not that she

loved silence, far from it, but that when her brother, as his custom was, began to shout and cry, the princess would soothe him to quietness with her low and gentle tones. Sometime she would lay her fair young hand on his mouth, while he in anger would grasp her by the hair, until her cries were mingled with his own. Still none durst check or chastise them: and as if to show how the small events of palaces affect the distant people, the tame birds of the castle, affrighted at the cries of the children, would begin to utter their scream, and the pet dogs to bark, until the sheep and oxen in the castle-grounds bleated and lowed with fear, and the people of the market-place ran to inquire the reason of this terror and noise: and all because two royal children quarrelled in their father's halls! All this was mere mirth to the thoughtless king: in return for their uproar he only indulged them with almonds and raisins, and fruit, which they would take and eat their fill, and then cast at each other in strife.

Thus cried they on from year to year, nor were they ever called on to learn, listen, or obey: whatsoever they asked for they had. Would to God, was the thought of many a mind, that there were but one rod left of their forefather's tree! But all was in vain. The king, quite swallowed up in the indulgence of his children, had quite forgotten the gray dwarf, and if he now and then remembered and feared the rod, it soon faded from his mind.

Now it came to pass, one lovely evening of the autumn-time that he took the children into his pleasance to walk there, and at last he seated himself on that mossy stone, where years before he had found the aged man, and where once the tree of his forefathers stood. There sat he down and watched his children as they sported with the swans upon the marble pool. Flowers sweet and beautiful grew at his feet, for the ashes of the birch had nurtured them there; and the sunbeams fondly fell on the fair and mellow leaves of the

autumn-tide. Then looked the king with pride on that glorious garden-field, his castle-roof that glittered in the sun, and his children at their joyful play, till the past was forgotten, and the future appeared to him one scene of summer smiles. "How happy," said he aloud, "am I, this day! What wealth is mine, and what might!"

But hardly had he said these words, when he heard behind him, as he thought, the low and hollow groan of the gray old man; it aroused the former wrath and he turned suddenly to see, but there was no one nigh. So again he rested himself on the stone, and said once more aloud, "Who hath power over me? Who can work my harm? Am I not mightier than all?" and now there sounded in his ears more plainly still, that low and hollow groan. He turned the second time, but saw no one, save his own children as they cast stones at the swans upon the pool. "Perchance," said he, it was the cry of the swan, and therewith he went on to meditate

aloud. "I needs must laugh," he said, "when I think on that old gray-beard and his tales! My ancestor a broom-binder, and my children broom-binders again! Thou crafty old cheat, with thy dreams and thy tales, to occupy my mind while thou didst filch my crown and sceptre from the tree! Would that thou hadst not escaped me that day, thou shouldst have been fastened to that burning tree, and there been glad thy falsehoods to forswear!"

"Forswear!" echoed a hollow voice, so close to the king, that he expected to see the pale thin face of the dwarf over his very shoulder when he looked up, but there was nothing nigh; and the hand he had stretched out to grasp the old man by the beard, only caught the overhanging branch of a gnarled tree. He now sprang up and searched the trees and rocks, and stamped upon the ground lest there should be some hollow cave: but there was nothing.

Sorely perplexed he sat him down again

upon that mossy stone. Suddenly he was again aroused, but it was no longer that hollow groan, it was the voice of his children as they cried and shouted by the brink of the marble pool. "A crown for me, cried the prince, a crown for me!" But the princess gazed down into the water, and said, "But for me a lamb, for me a lamb!" Then their father went towards the children to inquire what they sought. Now the prince had looked down into the water as it shone along its bed, and the sunbeams, trembling on the sand, had tinged it with various hues like the jewels he had seen in crowns. The gossamer also, as it gleamed upon the grass, appeared to the child like gold and silver thread. So he cried for a crown made with those gems and woven with that thread. Again at his cry of "a crown for me!" his sister hushed him with her voice, till she could have her silvery lamb with the rosy band, as she called the soft fleece of an evening cloud that shone, mirrored in that glassy stream.

The king soothed them as usual with fruit, but in vain; their cry was still for the crown and for the lamb, neither did they cease when the king brought forth his jewels from his treasury for his son, and offered the princess her choice of the sheep in his park. They became indeed so boisterous and bold that their father called to mind at last the words of the warning old man, and confessed their truth; and was grieved that his children had never learned the lesson of the rod and their forefather's tree. At last the king told them that on the morrow they should go with him to the forest where the prince should see the nest of the eagle, and the den of the young bears, while the princess should chase the leveret and drive the squirrel to the tree. This pleased them well and they went satisfied to sleep.



The Dark Bird .- The Princess and the Prince.

THEN early in the morning the king with his children rode forth from the castle gate, along a wild and lonely path, towards the depths of the forest. Mountain and valley rung with the hunter's joyful horn, and many an arrow pierced the panting prey. They reached at noon a green

and grassy glade, with trees that wreathed their branches all around it, like some leafy wall. Roses and sweetbriars of the forest grew along the ground, and the fence they made was so interwoven, that the dry water-course of a brook was the only pathway to this lovely Thither the king with his children place. went in, and there unconscious that it was the fatal tree, beneath a solitary birch which grew in the midst they sat down to rest. The king had commanded the nets to be set, and the hunters to drive the forest towards this glade, and there he and the children watched for the game. With his cross bow at his side and an arrow in his hand he rested there, and commanded his children that they should by no means move. Alas! he had forgotten that they had never learned to obey.

Soon, weary with the way, the good king slept, and then came the fruits of disobedience. The prince and his sister arose and bounded along the glade, and gathered the wild flowers of the forest, with which they wreathed a simple crown, and placed it on their slumbering father's brow. A rod, too, for a sceptre broken off from that birchen tree, placed they in his hand. Worn out with play the prince took one of the hunter's nets and placed it among the branches for a couch for his sister and himself. There lay they down, and, as their constant custom was, shouted, and strove, and cried. Their father slept. Then, strange to tell, all at once there flew above that tree a large dark bird of prey, his plumage was black like the moonless night, his eyes shone like flame, and his talons were like daggers, every one.

The voices of the children in the tree reached the ears of the bird; he swept downwards with a swift and mighty wing, and in a moment, the net, the children, and the branch were in his grasp, and with a stern and stately flight he sought with his prey the far and upper sky! the rush of his feathers awoke the slumbering king, but it was only to behold the last glimpses of his children as they passed away from his eyes. He stood in dumb despair, and watched the bird and his burden high in the vaulted air, until both had vanished clean away out of his sight. Then felt he on his brow the wild-rose crown, and in his hand was the birchen-rod. "Ah, woe is me," he cried, "the doom of the old man is here. My crown is indeed a fading wreath, my sceptre a rod of my forefather's tree, and my children are gone for ever."

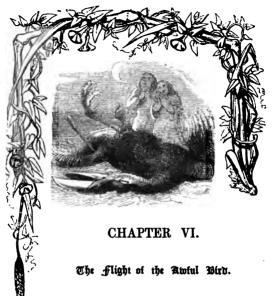
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Then he made haste and he sent for the swiftest hunters in that land; jewels rich and rare he promised them, and gold, if tidings could be found of that vast bird and his prey. But in vain they searched the forest and climbed the cliff; or mounted to the nest of the eagle in his rocky home; their toil was all in vain.

So the king went back to his own home in grief and despair: he bade them hang his castle-walls with cloth of woe, with every here and there a branch—of the birchen-bough, the last resting-place of those who were gone.

And there, in the pleasance, in the very spot where once had stood his own ancestral tree, in evil pride cut down, there did he command them to prepare his royal throne. There sat he day by day, with the withered crown of flowers, and the sceptre-rod his playful children gave, his eyes turned towards the upper air, the image of heart-broken repentance and despairing woe. But the trees blossomed and faded away, the swallows came over the sea and departed again and again, the hair on his his kingly head became thinner and more gray—the bird returned no more.





Now the native land of that vast and mighty bird was in the far bleak wintry north. Storms, wild and fierce, had urged him to a southward flight, but now with his prey he would fain return to the snow-clad rocks of his distant home. The cries of the children were sad, and filled with an awful fear, but their voices were scattered as they went in the

vast and solitary air. On the earth there was neither audience nor answer, and men went their way, every one in his own path, nor knew what grief and dread were above him in the sky. Sorrow had subdued at last the offspring of a haughty king, silent and hand in hand they sat, and learnt for the first time the meaning of the words, hunger and thirst.

Onward and onward rushed that mighty bird, and upward and upward still, and evermore towards the snowy mountains of his northern home. The mists of the evening melted over the hills: the shepherds chanted their homeward song: night came down upon the earth in silence: and star by star stood still, like funeral lamps around the mournful couch of the slumbering world. Darkness lay thick below, save here and there on the mountain-top shone the watchful-fire of shepherdmen. They saw the snow of the Alps, with its dull cold gleam, like some vast shroud, and ever and anon there was the sea that glimmered in the soft light of the moon, like

the pavement of Paradise. But they heard no sound in the air, save evermore the stern strong flap of those unvarying wings.

Time fled—below it was midnight on the clock, the hour of rest to all—to some of death—all, but the guilty, slept. It was the time when the hymn before the lamp ascends on high, the perfume of the voice of prayer! On went the bird, the large bright stars above, the shrouded earth below, onward on that lonely, silent, and mysterious way; but no watcher on the loftiest tower of earth could trace his airy flight.

Sad grew the children of the king, and sadder still: thoughts of their father came, and of that home where they had been nurtured in luxury, and kind and loving eyes had watched them all the day long: and now, cast out, forsaken, lost, the prey of an unclean bird. They lifted up their voices and wept. Then prayed they unto God their Father, and He heard them, and He gave them a calm, and silent, and gracious sleep.

The bird bare them onward as they slept; night waned. The stars grew dim, and the blush of morning was on the brow of the East; gradually the countenance of the sun came up, and life, joy, and loveliness rushed from his smile. The children awoke, and their hope brightened with the dawn; fair and glorious the mountains shone through the mist; one by one, castle, and church, and tower glittered along the land; and here and there some shining river ran, like a vein of molten silver, to the cauldron of the sea! But the scenery, though lovely to look upon, became to the hearts of those children mournful and cold: for they felt how fair soever it might be, it was not their own country, their native and natural land.

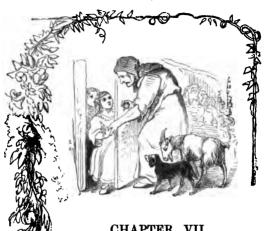
Three days and three nights the bird flew on. The dews of the evening quenched the thirst of those desolate ones, and the leaves of the branch were their only food. On the evening of the third day they soared above the sea; the vast wilderness of water lay below

them like some wide and wintry plain that had been furrowed by many a storm. A single and stately vessel rode, her white sails snowy in the sun, upon the waves, and at the stern, clothed in white garments, there stood a minstrel-youth. Now the bird, weary with his long long flight, had gradually sunk lower and lower along the sea, and as he glided over that ship the youth aimed a golden arrow at his breast; it smote him in the right wing. Still once more the bird gathered together his vast strength, and soared again on high; but the barb was in the wound, he bled within; slowly his heart failed him, and when the moon arose he was floating with outstretched wings, on the waves of the sea, dead.

Then the children cast off the net and the branch, and placed themselves side by side on the vast carcase of the bird. A storm arose, but they clung close to his feathers; it ceased, and they lay down, they thought, to die. They lifted up their voices and prayed, and then hand in hand they slept. Sweet,

with all those horrors around them, was the scenery of their dreams. They saw their own garden at home, and they felt around them their father's arms once more, and in that perilous slumber they smiled. They were no longer desolate and alone.





CHAPTER VII.

Of an Ancient Woman and her favourite Bog.

THE wind wafted them gently in their sleep along the waters, and they awoke on the shore of a strange island, at the foot of a tall cliff that frowned over the sea; but the dead carcase of the bird was gone. The prince was the first to spring up and clamber from rock to rock, and with his help his sister followed him. They reached

a green and grassy slope, difficult to ascend, but with naked feet and bare, they patiently strove on, and at the last they reached at the summit a plain and level place. There was a small inclosure there, and they heard within it the bleat of a lonely kid; the garden was surrounded by a hedge thick with thistles and thorns, so interwoven that there seemed no pathway through; but they searched it carefully along, and at the last they found a rugged iron door.

There was in this door a lattice, also of iron, and the princess with the help of her brother stood upon a large stone, and looked in. But there was neither pleasance nor castle there, stately tree or golden roof; in their stead she saw a sorry garden of herbs, a poor and lowly hut, and a stall for the goats where the kid bleated within. The trees were loaded with fruit, and one fair bough drooped so lowly over the door that it well nigh touched the forehead of the prince; yet though there was no one nigh that he saw, and he was overcome

with hunger and thirst, he touched not a single fruit. He gazed once more around the garden, and at length he saw a woman, old, low in stature, and bent, who knelt among the plants and gathered up the weeds. At her side there was a small black dog that seemed as though he slept, for his eyes were closed, and he moved neither head nor foot.

At first Prince Schreimund thought that she might hear them where they stood, but she did not look up. He would have spoken to her, but the remembrance of that Dark Bird, and the journey in the air, and the cold and awful sea, overwhelmed him with silent fear; he bent down, therefore, and said in his sister's ear, "Beseech thou this aged woman, with thy soft and moving voice, that she will have pity on us. Surely when she hears thee speak, she will hearken."

Then the princess stood once more upon the stone, and put her face to the wicketbars, and called in her gentlest tone—"Ah, mother dear! in Gop's good Name, open to us this iron gate, to us poor children: we are brought low with hunger and thirst, and we know not in this strange land any shelter from the beasts of prey where we may lie down to rest." But the aged woman seemed deaf, for she neither lifted up her head nor answered; the black dog however at her side leaped up from the ground, and growled, and sprang so suddenly at the wicket that he rent the cheek of the princess with his teeth. She fell, weeping, to the ground, and the prince in his wrath would have wrought vengeance on the dog: but his sister forbade him, and laid her hand upon his mouth. Once more she stood upon the stone, and again she made her entreaty, in words that might have softened a rock, while her brother. the prince, stood in anxious anger by.

At the last the woman arose, and came slowly with tottering feet towards the door. She seemed very old and poor, and worn with many cares; as though want and the weight of years had bowed her down, and grief had ploughed deep furrows in her brow. Her hands were dark and thin, and her head shook with the palsy of age. There was nothing evil in her look, but her countenance was stern. She stood before the door, and when the princess was about to renew her supplication, she said—

"Cease! I have heard your desire to enter my hut, but thou must knock at some other door, my dwelling is small, there is barely room enough for my dog and me, and I have no employment for such as thou art. Go elsewhere, in Goo's good Name."

Then the princess began to weep, and sought leave to relate her tale. She began the History of the Dark Bird.

"Hush, child," said the woman, "I know it well; I saw thy flight yesterday, in dreams; I know, too, the language of the eyes, and I can tell by a look the thoughts of the heart. Your father, too, the king, is known to me right well, and his deeds; how he suffered no one to enter his pleasance, and drove thence

my poor brother weary with age, and would have burned him with thine ancestor the broom-binder's tree. Ye, too, I know, the Prince Schreimund, with the ever-fretful voice. and the Princess Schweigstilla, that is never at rest. Surely it was a dark bird of evil omen that bare you away. But ye, rebellious children, why were ye not obedient to your father's voice? and wherefore did ye bring down the Dark Bird by your cries, and were not silent in the net? And now, for sooth, ye would come into my poor garden and hut! But I am old and cannot hear noise and I give much work and little bread, an unaccustomed life for you. No; make haste, in God's good Name, elsewhere; seek some one of your father's friends, they will unclose to you the door."

"Ah!" cried the children, "mother dear, see how we tremble from hand to foot, we shall perish with famine here at thy very door; fain would we go farther, but we cannot, with our wounded feet: alas, mother dear!

be merciful and take us in, we will promise thee to be silent and good, and all that thou shalt bid us we will do; and for food we will be satisfied with the same that thou givest to thy dog."

The aged crone at last drew forth a rusty key, and said, "Well, weep no more; I meant no evil: but I sought to know if ye could bear a harsh command, and if ye knew how to ask humbly, otherwise ye should have learned it at my door. And now, come in, but mark ye well my words, I have no time to waste in speech; if therefore you obey not at once, at the first sound of my voice, depart to return no more! Heed you?"

Now Schweigstilla and Schreimund reckoned this so easy a thing, that they promised at once never to be disobedient more. Then went they in after her, and bent humbly before that aged woman, as the servants of the castle had bowed themselves aforetime to them.



CHAPTER VIII.

The Children. — The Woman. — The Bog.

SHE led them into the cottage, and gave a piece of bread to each, and placed before them in a wooden bowl some black oatmeal broth; and they thought this sorry fare more savoury than the rich food of their former home. They devoured it to the last crumb, and could

have eaten more; but the aged woman said, "I told you that with me there would be much to do and little to eat, for I am often myself hungry, and I am poor."

Now when they had eaten, the first thing she did was to take off from them their silken and embroidered apparel; "these garments," she said, "are for kings' chambers, but not for a cottage like mine." Then she took from an old oak chest clothing of frieze, and gave to them each, with shoes of wood to wear. "To-day," she told them, "is for rest, but to-morrow for work."

At night they found that there was no bed but a layer of dried moss, but thereon they lay down, and thanked GoD for their shelter, and sweetly slept until the morning, when the dog awoke them with scratch and cry. The life they now led in that hut was a life of hardship and poverty; a life of obedience, suffering, and toil; how different from their happy days in their father's home! There every wish was fulfilled, here must they obey the wishes

of another; there they had servants of their own, here they must wait upon even the dog and the kid; at home they laughed when they listed, in that hut they must hide their very tears; in the castle of the king there was ever something fresh and new, but now one day passed like another, in the same cold, dull, unvarying round.

When they arose in the morning, they knelt and said their childhood's prayers: then the prince must kindle the fire, and the princess milk the goat: often it was Schreimund's task to bind the brooms wherewith the house and stall were swept, and to put the food upon the fire. The garden was always weeded by their soft hands; in the scorching summer they had to fetch water, and in the icy winter, to gather wood. When the old woman had eaten, they might eat also, and afterwards the dog.

Every now and then she took them with the dog and the goat along the meadow to the sea. The name of the goat was Zick-Zick,

and merrily could she bound from rock to rock. When she roamed out of sight, then it was Prince Schreimund's task to follow her. and to clamber along the cliff until his sister would weep with fear. The small black dog was called Vauvah, and Schweigstilla had to bathe him every day in the sea, and lest he should roll himself in the sand, the prince would carry him back to the hut in his arms. As if to try them well they were called on to submit to all the caprices and tricks of the dog, and to bear the blame of all that he did; and to enforce it. Prince Schreimund must not only bind brooms but also provide a rodwhich instrument of obedience was by no means spared. "I must make up," she said, for their father's neglect."

Then too, like all old people that are grown infirm, her temper, never sweet, by no means improved; she looked that contradictory orders should be obeyed, and if there was any failure of obedience, then, at once, behold the rod! If Vauvah committed any theft, they

might have done it; if her spindle fell, and the dog rent the clew, it was their fault; nay, when she stumbled in the garden, Schreimund must have placed the stone in her way. Neither, glad though they were when evening came, did night conclude their grief. They had their couch of moss at the right side of her bed, the rod lay on the left, and Vauvah at her feet. If they chanced to move, or even sighed in their dreams, the dog would begin to growl, and his mistress struck blindly at at the children.

In the dark sometimes, when the wind shook the casement, or the mouse cheeped in the wall, or if Vauvah only dreamt of noise, he would make his signal, and at once she would seize the rod, and strike, and cry, "Will you never rest, godless children that you are, have you not made my days unquiet? must my nights be so also? To-morrow ye shall go."

How changed was the scene from that time when their cries, unrestrained in the castle, spread tumult and uproar in the city! Often in the moonlit night, when all lay in silent slumber in the hut, would Schweigstilla awake, and rise up and gaze on that stern old woman and her rod, and her slumbering brother, with the moonlight soft upon his cheek; and the remembrance of father, mother, home, happiness, all these images would come back upon her soul with a flow of gentle tears. "When, O dear God," she would say, "when will our sorrows end? Shall we ever more see our own country, and our father's face?"





CHAPTER IX.

The Mages.

Now the life they led in that lowly cottage had little pleasure or joy, but on the contrary labour and pain; yet the children loved each other more in their exile, than they ever did in their native home. There had been strife in the castle, in the hut there was peace. Their bread, too, was scanty and dark, but hunger, that excellent baker, made it very sweet. Their couch was thinly spread, but weariness softened it to their limbs; they slept, and their slumbers were deep. Their labour also, at first so hard, became softer and lighter by use; and when they went into the garden, which their own hands had planted and cleansed, and carried in the flowers and fruits, an apple from some tree they had cherished was to them a dear and a pleasant reward.

A year had passed over the hut since they went in to live with that aged woman, and Zick-Zick her goat, and her small black dog Vauvah; when one evening she called the children, and said, "Now that you are become industrious, and obedient, and peaceful, I shall give you your hire. Gold or jewels, like your father, you well know I have not, and he in the midst of it all, what doth it profit him

now? But there is a reward that I will give you which the worm can never gnaw, nor the robber carry away; one that will ever do you good all your life long. Here, in this old oak chest, wherein I placed your princely robes when I put on you the garb of the poor, here is my treasure; it was my brother's gift, that old gray man, with the white beard and sordid clothing, who admonished your father the king under the tree."

They were now bidden to stand back while she unlocked the mysterious chest, that they might not see its contents. Then she drew out and held up before their eyes, a large glass, wherein all things were mirrored on every side! It was meanly framed, and there was nothing beautiful to look upon on the outside; so that she said, "Doubtless when you call to mind the mirrors of your father's house, set in jewels and gold, this glass may seem to you common and poor; but if the king had had this glass, and had looked into it now and then, he might still have been a

happy man, he would have seen your peril and have rescued you from the Dark Bird.

"Know then that this is the ancient and awful glass of life; it came down from king Solomon, with whom dwelt Truth, that which so many seek and find not. Wonderful is the power of this glass; whosoever shall look therein shall gather wisdom, riches, and knowledge, and shall see in its pictured images the mysteries of earth. It warns and humbles the proud in their prosperity, and it soothes and exalts the miserable in their woe. Often have I read in your eyes that the toil in my cottage was hard to you, and that you, because you knew no better, have murmured over it. Now will I show you what a blessing industry is, in that you shall see in this glass a picture of sloth, then will you learn to thank me for your toil." Thus said she, and forthwith she held up before the eyes of the children, the glass.

At the first they could see nothing—excess of light blinded them: a thousand figures and

hues flashed before their eyes, but all was mingled and indistinct; but by degrees they became accustomed to the light, and a large and glorious picture was unrolled before them. There was a vast, wide, smiling plain; the sun shone brightly over it: it was a glad and blessed scene. On the one hand there was spread a pleasant field, and rich with golden corn, on the other there were furrows clothed with the bright green blade; the vineyard reddened on the hills, and beneath, the orchard smiled. A clear and glassy stream flowed along the meadows of the valley, and was lost in the sheltering forest beyond.

Now in the midst of that plain there was a field, and within it a plough with four yoke of oxen, and between the stilts a man. He was tall and strong, the master and owner of that plain; in one hand he held the reins and in the other a goad, and behind him on the ground there was a sack of corn for seed. Slowly and unwillingly he cut the furrows of that field; often

would the oxen stand still and lick up the grass on the right hand and the left; and the man seemed glad to stand still also; they strayed still farther away for food, and he followed them; they dragged the plough under a large stone, and the man sat himself down upon it to rest; the reins fell from his fingers, and he folded his hands on his breast. The oxen dragged on the plough, and he suffered them to go whither they would; but the heat of the sun grew strong, and lazily he crept under the shadow of a tree, and closed his eyes and slept.

Meanwhile the oxen dragged farther and farther the plough, until it was broken into fragments under their feet. Then, released, they sought the field of corn, and trod it out and trampled it as they fed; they entered the place where the green blades moistly grew, and grazed there until they lay down swollen and helpless on the ground: but the man slept calmly on. The mice came out of their holes and ate into the sacks, so that the corn fell out, and some

was scattered by the winds, and the rest, the birds devoured it. But the slumberer under the tree awoke not, yet the shadow moved, though he lay still. The sun beat fiercely on his brow and he awoke, but it was only for a moment; he turned himself angrily out of the sun; as the shadow moved, so did he, and there all day, in wrath that the shadow caused him to move at all, he slumbered and slept. In the meantime insects had devoured the buds, worms had consumed many a root, the brook had overflowed, and one part of the plain was covered with water, while another was parched with fervent heat; but the weary sleep went on.

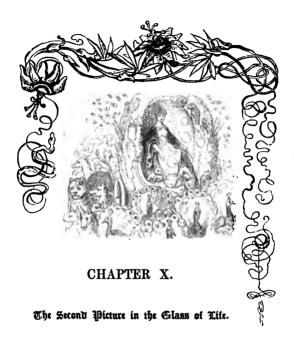
At the last an unnatural numbness seized his hands and his feet, and the stroke of the sun smote him so sternly on the brow, that he became as one half dead. Then evening came; the wild beasts of the forest rushed in: the swine rooted up the seed; the tender saplings were eaten by the hungry deer, and wolves devoured his oxen where they lay.

The happy plain was become a howling and desolate wilderness. At the last the man awoke, when it was midnight and cold; he looked around and beheld the abominations, and fain would he have gone from that place: but it was too late, his feet and his hands were powerless; and a raven boldly came and stood on his shoulder, and devoured his eyes. With a wild and fearful cry he fell upon the ground, and the wolves that had destroyed his oxen grasped him also, and bare him off to the forest, so that no trace or token of that slothful man was evermore seen in the lands.

The children were filled with grief and horror at the sight of the desolation of idleness, and the fate of the slumbering man, and they thanked the stern and aged woman for the good lesson which that pictured glass had imprinted on their minds; and from that time forth they behaved peacefully and worked well; and if at any time they had fain do less, they remembered that unhappy and

slothful man, the tree, the raven, and the wolf, and they went with fresh heart to their task; nay, they were grateful to their mistress in that she had taught them discipline and toil.





Now the second year which the children passed in the hut was an exact copy in all things of the first. Sadly sometimes at evening-tide they looked over the sea, but they had been long ago lighter of heart; they had learned to bow down patiently to their fate,

and had become accustomed to the sternness of the aged dame, to Vauvah's vexatious ways, and the perilous leaps of the goat.

At length in the evening of the last day of the year she went again to the old oak chest, and took thence the glass, and said, "Herein you saw the blessing of labour, and the curse of sloth; now shall you behold in it the end of pride."

"Nay," said the children, "mother dear, show us some other picture in that glass, for what have we to do with pride here in thy lowly hut?"

"It is true," she said, "that you are again become broom-binders like your forefathers; for thou, Schreimund, bindest brooms, and thou, Schweigstilla, dost sweep with them, and ye dwell here with me in poverty and lowliness; yet think not, therefore, that ye are secure from presumption, vanity, and pride."

"But tell us," the children made reply, "how we can return to our arrogance here in this cottage? No servants bow down before us, as in our father's house; there are none to flatter or praise. We are poor children who must wait on thy dog and goat, and yield our backs to labour all the day long; surely pride and vanity must depart from us here!"

"You speak like inexperienced children." the aged woman replied; "remember my gray hairs, and believe me the pride of a flattered princess can as easily inhabit the poor man's hut, as the castle of a king. The man who is puffed up with self-conceit will place himself before the glass, and put on his beggar's cloak with as much self-complacency as the king his royal robe: if none else flatter, he will praise himself; if he have no other honour, he will enjoy his own; and if none bow down before him, he will still exalt himself on the pedestal of his own admiration, and burn before him the incense of his own pride. Take heed, then, to yourselves; be humble, and fear GoD; strew your heads with dust and ashes, and let no proud thoughts creep into your hearts.

"And now, heed well my words; this glass shall show you the heart of man under the semblance of a stately city, adorned for a feast; it will manifest to your eyes pride as it reigns over princes, with the vices that come in its train; but it will also reveal the mournful end of their pomp, and how they fall at last with shame." And when she had thus said, she held up again the glass to the children's eyes.

Wonderful was the vision and strange, which now they stood to see—never thought they they could gaze on it enough. There, before them, lay a large and stately city; it was a gorgeous country of the East. The crescent gleamed in its streets on a hundred golden mosques, green hills smiled around it on every side; the patient palm-tree, the stately cedar, and the shadowy pine looked down upon the walls; while the citron and orange, with their snowy blossoms and golden fruit,

breathed the incense of their breath along the fragrant air. The city itself was adorned with palace and theatre, tower and stately hall. bazaars and galleries of art, and all that could be looked for in a great and glorious place. The people, clad in festal robes, thronged the streets, that were strewn with embroidery and flowers. Altars, small and large, were on every side, where golden censers burned, and golden vessels of frankincense stood ready The lattices from street to roof were there. filled with faces; children hung upon the doors to watch. The balconies were crowded with women and maidens, in their richest apparel of jewels and of gold. The lame and the halt were brought out and laid by the gate: the blind stretched forth their heads to hear, and even the sick were brought to the window that they might see. Thus waited all that multitude in tumultuous expectation.

Strangers who saw that day the people and their city, must have thought that some conquering king was about to enter in royal triumph to offer thanks for some glorious victory, and that for his welcome there were there, the flowers, and the altars, and the gathered throng. But the people whispered among themselves about some mighty sorceress, her powerful spells, and her boundless wealth.

Suddenly there was a quick movement, and a thousand voices shouted, "She comes! She comes!" Every head was uncovered, and every voice was hushed. Then the multitude divided with deep respect, and onward came as heralds of the train, four white deer, which bounded and sprang; and bare each of them on both horns, a stately cock crested with tall feathers and a ruddy comb. At every open space and cross, the deer began to separate and bound, and the cocks with stretched-out wings to crow in their shrillest tones, as though to announce to the people the approach of their lady and mistress, the mightiest princess in all the world.

The four heralds were followed next by the

flag-bearers of the sorceress, a company of chimpanzees very gaily dressed, who with their banners on their lances, proudly came on, and looking gravely on the people, smiled and bowed with condescending demeanour on the right hand and the left.

After these came onward the band of the sorceress; foremost stalked, stately and tall, a host of storks that chattered as they went; then followed fast a car with field-pipers, and meadow-mice, and mountain-rats, who as music-masters gave and kept the time. For the chorus, came starlings and geese, magpies and crows, all marshalled in rank; and last of all marched the bittern, and loudly boomed his drum.

Next arrived her servants and officers of her court, footmen, and maids, grooms of the chamber, and the ladies of her train. These were chiefly foxes, female and male, they had all their allotted places, and wore the same dress, although of their beards, noses, and tails, some were long and some short, many

narrow and many broad; and while some moved onward with light footstep and careless mirth, others put on a grave and solemn face; but all had the common gift of walking so softly as hardly to be heard.

Then all at once there was a deep flutter among the people; they sunk upon their knees; thickly from window, roof, and terrace, rained down the flowers, incense breathed from every altar, and, behold, surrounded by the foxes. and covered with a cloud of many-coloured moths, drawn by eight prancing peacocks, came slowly on the car of triumph, and the magic princess! It was of transparent glass. richly gilded, hung round with bells; and it shone and glittered exceedingly. The princess sat within it on a throne, but so fine was its texture and clear, and so cunningly devised, that she seemed to float upon a blue and vapoury cloud. Above her there was an arch woven of laurel and palm, the symbol of her victories in war, and her achievements in peace; on it there sat a solemn squirrel clothed

in a scarlet mantle, and he held before him a golden shield, with this legend, "Vanity of Vanities."

Before the car there flew a multitude of quails, to whom the people bowed reverently; indeed their unceasing cry was, "Bend the Bend the knee!" knee! Behind the car there was a flock of cuckoos, and at their call of "Cuckoo" every one looked up and praised the princess. The coachman of Queen Vanity was an old and bloated frog: her councillors who sat in the branches of the arch were crickets, gnat-snappers, and parrots; and at her side, in the corner of the car, there lay on a soft warm bed a soft and lovely cat, which every now and then she stooped down to caress.

On either side of the car, as lifeguards of the queen, there walked two tigers, with open mouth, sharp claw, and shining teeth; and whosoever did not bend at the cry of the quails, or forget to praise the princess when he heard the cuckoos' call, these would place their paws silently on their necks, and bow down their heads till they were overcome with awe and fear.

The sorceress, Queen Vanity herself, was clothed in a large mantle of wrought gold, and on her brow she had a diadem of price, the sheen whereof almost blinded the eye, but when closely examined it was found to be wreathed not of jewels and gold, but of shining servents woven together, with their heads and their venomous tongues close to that lady's ear. Before her on the steps of the throne her butler knelt, a gray old stately fox; he held in his hand a golden vessel set with diamonds and pearls, but within it there was nothing but common water and soap, and with these he made, and breathed before the face of his mistress, bubbles of many a hue, wherein she beheld herself reflected, and mirrored also there the glories of the world. At her feet there stood vessels of gold, filled with precious stones, and emblems of honour. and glittering baubles of many a kind, whereon

she looked with one unvarying smile. Listlessly she leaned on her throne; sometimes she would gaze on her own image in the bubbles that floated by; every now and then she caressed and fed her favourite cat; then she would issue her orders to the parrots in the laurel boughs; or in turn listen to the advice which the crickets and gnat-snappers gave.

But from time to time, when the shouts of the people were more than usually loud, and the showers of garlands fell more thickly down, or when the clouds of incense increased around her, she would subdue her haughtiness awhile, and gently bend towards her ladies and her lords. Then would she gather from the vessels at her side a handful of jewels or badges of renown, and though every hand was stretched out to her, she would look neither to the right hand nor the left, but blindly cast her gifts among the crowd, and whosoever could catch the meanest of them, would embrace it in their enchantment, and hold it fondly to their breast.

At a long distance behind the car came on a countless flock of snow-white sheep, adorned with ribbons blue and red, and flowers. These harmless creatures deemed themselves happy even to be in the train, or to wear a garland of the great princess: and then, to conclude the procession, came her treasurers, a troop of famished wolves, who looked towards the sheep with many a longing eye.

Such was the grand triumph of the mightiest of all the sorcerers, Queen Vanity; and thus they moved on, slowly and proudly, through the streets of that decorated city with joy and glory. But hardly had they reached the middle of the market-place when there arose a soft light wind, which gently stirred the dust, until it was blown in the face of the heralds, and the band, and the followers, nay, the very queen herself; even the sheep and wolves were covered with it. The dust then became thicker and the wind more strong, insomuch that they had great difficulty to move on, especially the banner-bearers, who

could hardly hold up their flags. The kingat-arms on the arch, in his scarlet mantle, knew not how to hold fast his shield. And now the skies grew black, and a soft rain began to fall; soon the wind increased to storm, and the rain became a torrent. The people made haste into their houses, their windows and doors were shut, and the altars with their garlands were taken down. The streets were deserted, none tarried there but Queen Vanity and her train, to do battle with the storm.

The fury of the tempest fell first upon the deer, and dashed the crowing birds from their horns; the banner-bearers gave way, and next the musicians of the queen. It was strange to see how immediately they yielded to the storm. The foxes turned their backs to the wind, and thought thus craftily to baffle its wrath; but the rain began to fall like rivers from the sky; torrents from the mountains filled the city; the streets ran like brooks of water, and all that could not swim must die.

There was a sudden crash of storm, and in a moment the car of the princess was shattered into fragments of glass. The arch of triumph was rent, and the parrots, the crickets, and the gnat-snappers, nay, the queen also herself, fell into the water with the broken car; the vessels with their precious stones and badges of honour were scattered by the wind. The foxes fled, but took with them in their haste all they could find. The wolves and the tigers rent and feasted on the sheep; but none thought of their poor mistress, who lay in her rich gold raiment in the water, and called in vain for help.

Then storm and tempest triumphed over her; the water-floods came, and she died. The stony soil washed down from the mountains was heaped upon her by the stream, and became to her a grave; and there, in the market-place, in the morning they found her buried by the storm. On the mound where she lay was the body of the dead king-at-arms, his scarlet mantle rent in pieces; but he still held fast his shield with the legend, "Vanity of vanities."

The children were by this time weary with this large picture, and the visions it contained; the old woman therefore put the glass again into the dark oak chest, and locked it in, and said, "I will not now tell you what all these birds and animals may mean; think for yourselves, in time you will understand it all. But again I say to you, guard well your hearts from the Princess Vanity and all her sorceries; and now that your time of slumber is at hand, say your childhood's prayers, and sleep."





The Third and Last Vision of the Glass.

THE year that followed was passed by those children peacefully as before; calmly it fled, as the days of their forefather in his lonely hut beside the whispering birch tree of the silent grove. Neither boat nor vessel drew nigh that island-shore; the birds that flew over the hills were the only signs they ever

saw of any other region of earth. Meanwhile they grew taller and wiser every day, and when the last evening of the year grew dim she suffered them once more to look into the magic glass; but she gave them no word or token as before of what they should see; and the vision which they saw, was in the beginning sorrow, and in the end joy.

Before them was the sea, a dark and awful midnight sojourned on the waves; no star shone down from heaven. The storm howled as it were for prey; the black billows rolled on towards the shore, dark as the raven's wing, and then burst into crested foam, like the mane of the white horse in the day of battle. In their midst there rose and fell upon the water a small, weak vessel, wherein a female form, clothed in white garments, held in her hands a golden harp, and knelt before a marble altar, from whence there shone along the darkness a soft and tremulous flame: it was the only light upon the sea, and when it gleamed down through the waters the strange

monsters of the deep appeared, as they thronged around that ship for prey; and when the radiance reached the shore, there too, wild beasts were seen which lurked among the rocks to rush upon whatsoever came up from the sea.

Behind that maiden, borne upon the billows, floated the angel of death; he was clad in a mantle black as night, and his strong fierce grasp was on that vessel, as he urged it onward towards a perilous rock that stood alone amidst the seething waves. Once and again she struck, and evermore moaned and sighed like a thing with life. The maiden and the altar shook, and the water came in even to the deck whereon she stood. sunk the bark, but one shock more, and lo! the dark spirit shall prevail. But the maiden lifted up her eyes to heaven; she prepared, like the swan of the river, to die in song; she touched the strings of her harp, turned towards the flame of sacrifice on the altar, and poured along the deep a voice, sad, sorrowful, and sweet, as the tones of a penitent and pardoned soul among the trees of paradise; "Father," she said, "I forgive, let me be forgiven!"

The sound of that strain was at the first soft, tremulous, and weak; but as the heart of hope grew strong, it waxed into a full, and loud, and mighty melody; and at the last it echoed like the voice of a trumpet that proclaimed the Presence and the Power of the Most High Gop. The angel of death listened and ceased from his warfare; he unclasped his weary arms, his limbs relaxed in sleep, and all around became silent, gentle, calm. wrath of the tempest died away: the waves slumbered into peace: the monsters of the sea went down into the depths; the wild beasts of the shore sought their den; the voice of the maiden alone shook silence from the night, and the quiet flame upon the altar was the only visible thing. But her harp no longer breathed the bitter cry of sorrow, it was song triumphant; it was the music of victory; a laud and a thanksgiving to the most glorious God.

Then the dark clouds all at once were scattered away; a soft mild light appeared; the arch of peace rested on the slumber of the waves, and that rainbow bound together heaven and earth. A great company of angels that floated around, gathered on that beamy bow and rejoiced over the tones of the maiden as they came up; and in their midst, light that was love, came forth like a river, and flowed towards the sea until it rested on the brow of the sweet singer of the waters, and dwelt in glory there. Yet the vessel sunk deeper and deeper still, and seemed as though it were grown heavy with death.

Then came an angel calmly down from the arch of the bow, with a palm branch in his hand. It was a spirit of peace. The maiden received it in silent awe, and laid it on the altar with the sound of the harp and song. And now the perilous rock unclosed, and behold a bright and glorious tree, embowered with roses, stood in the midst. Then the angel took the maiden by the hand and led

her to the tree. "Hallelujah!" was the psalm she sung; garlands grew around her shining form; slowly she went up, amid the song of angels and in the light that was love; and the vessel of her voyage disappeared in the depths of the sea. They welcomed her in heaven, and wreathed around her brow a chaplet, with stars for flowers. This was the vision that sunk most into their youthful hearts.

Then their aged mistress placed the glass again in the old oak chest; but the song of the maiden sounded still in their ears, and they saw before them yet the angel's shining form. Then said she to the children, "Be ye holy and good; like that maiden sing to the harp your songs of penitence; evermore praise God. Amid the storms of this miserable world, with pain, peril, and death around you, watch and pray: let not the flame on the altar fail, but with faith and duty feed the sacrifice. Then shall you reach the tree of heaven when the vessel of life is overwhelmed

and gone; and ye, too, shall ascend, and wear a crown of stars in the Presence of God. But now to bed, to-morrow for fresh labour for Schreimund and for thee; thou to the broom, and he to the wood."





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THE flowers of the forest had faded yet again; and another year had glided away, like some silent and secret stream! and the children began to long for another vision of the magic glass. It was the last day of the year, and they went forth as usual, with goat and dog, across the meadow to the shore. But as they

turned on their homeward way they cast one lingering glance towards the sea, and there, clambering over the rocks, they were aware of a short gray old man. They went towards him, and as they drew nigh, they perceived that it could be none other than the brother of their mistress; he who had appeared to their father, the king, in his pleasance, under the birch tree of their ancestor; and who had vanished with sceptre and crown.

He seemed to have undergone no change. He wore the self-same mantle of gray; on his head was the pilgrim's hat, adorned with Syrian shells; on his left hand sat a small white dove, and in his right he held his ancient staff, and something, what they knew not, folded in a napkin beside. Wearily he climbed the cliff, and ever and anon he paused to rest, as though he had accomplished a journey, and the way had been long. The children ran towards him, half joyful, half afraid, and greeted him with friendly words: he, too, looked on them kindly and earnestly, and at last he said"Ha! how is my aged sister? and how is Vauvah the dog, and the goat Zick-Zick; and how, above all, are the children of the king?"

Then the prince and the princess answered, "Our aged mother sits by the fire and makes ready our food; Vauvah barks and rolls in the sand; and Zick-Zick bounds merrily from rock to rock: and wouldest thou know if we, the children, are good, ask thy sister, and she will tell thee."

They then offered to help the old man, but he refused and said, "I will give you something to carry home. Then he gave Schweigstilla the small white dove, with a red and silken cord around its neck, and it sat upon her hand; but to Schreimund he gave the napkin with its weight. Then the princess took the goat by the string, and her brother the little dog in his arms, and thus with the old man they slowly approached the hut. Anxious for their return their mistress sat in the cottage door, and she rejoiced when she saw them, and her brother with them, exceedingly.

Then the old man threw his staff up in the air, and shouted, "Thank Gon! sister dear, now will we be right joyful."

And she answered, "Good luck be thine, dear brother, and Goo's kind blessing; welcome to my hut!"

Heartily they shook hands, and he said, "Now must I ask thee, are the children good? Tell me the truth. Have they learned to obey? Do they still break thy rest? Do they pray? Are they silent, humble, pure? Have they bent their backs to the yoke of toil? And will they give up their own will to thine?"

Then she looked kindly towards them, and said, "The rod of their forefather's tree hath done its work well. Schweigstilla is as mild as a lamb, and Schreimund has learned to labour and obey. They are wise, and they are good; their pride and vanity are gone, and they have eaten with bitter tears the golden fruit of discipline. Therefore can I praise them well; they have stood the test; and all

men may see that they have reaped rescue and repentance from the seed of sorrow."

Great joy had the gray dwarf when he heard this. He laid his hands upon their heads, and said, "Thank Goo, for the change; now grief and misery are gone. To-day we will eat, and drink, and be joyful, and to-morrow you shall return to your own home, and your father's house; there will you find the king on a garden-throne."

They hardly knew the meaning of his words; so the old man bade them wait patiently until the morning, and he would tell them all; with this promise they were content, and when they had eaten their meal they caressed the white dove until sleep came over their eyes.





CHAPTER XIII.

The Ship and the Farewell.

THE next day the old man called the children, and said, "Know, that I come from your father's pleasance; but alas, what a change is there! The glory of the garden is gone,

and the pride of a mighty king! There, in that which is now a wilderness, your father has yielded up his soul to grief from the day when you were lost to the Dark Bird. There the blossoms have long languished; the pleasant place is become a scenery of woe; bushes of the wild birch have once more grown up as in your ancient forefather's time; birds again build their nests around one of your race. The king! and he wears a withered crown of wild flowers, and bears in his hand the sceptre of a sorry rod beneath a birchen tree.

"I stood before him, for the time of the curse was fulfilled; and I announced to him that the hours of sorrow were over, and that you, his children, were yet alive. Then your father bounded for joy; and he blessed the memory of his ancestor, and shouted the praise of the birchen tree; fain would he be guided where you dwelt. But I bade him be patient, and wait until I had seen you, and found if in the school of sorrow you had learned wisdom, and looked with profit in the

glass of life. And now, here I am; I perceive that my sister's words are true; you shall return to your father's castle, and I, weary with long wandering, will tarry here in your stead, and end in silence and in solitude my days."

Then the hearts of the children beat fast with joy; in their gladness they told the tale to Vauvah and Zick-Zick, who looked as though they understood their words. And then they went again to the old man, and said, "But tell us, father dear, how shall we find the long long way over land and sea to our parent's house? Will not that dark and evil bird come and bear us away once more, to perish with hunger and thirst?"

"Nay," answered he, "nay, be at peace, all shall be well. Behold this dove, she had built her nest at your father's side; she came from her bough to my hand, and I brought her hither to be your guide. She so longs for home that she will ever lead you rightly on your way: and down by the sheltered shore

there is a vessel with silken sails; wafted by the wind it shall bear you swiftly to your home."

Then did the good old woman prepare bread and fruit for their food by the way. And she brought forth from the old oak chest their royal apparel, and she said, "These garments are too small for you now, yet keep them with care; they will put you in mind why you left them off; this glass, too, wherein you have looked thrice, take it with you, and evermore examine yourselves diligently in this mirror of truth. Remember the Dark Bird, and my hut, and the kind chastisement that was for your good."

Then the old man unfolded his napkin, and behold, there were green sandals, and a sceptre, and crown; and he said, "The homeward way is rough and long, therefore have I brought these sandals for your feet; salute ye this sceptre and this crown; they are the ancient jewels of your race; they were first won by the child of the thicket in the

birch wood, in the cause of that tree which your father's fury cut down; bear them to him once more, instead of the thorny wreath of roses and the birchen-rod. Say to him that your gifts have done their work; the thorn of sorrow hath made him humble, and the rod of correction, wise. Bid him no longer scorn the legend of his line, nor his lowly fore-father's tree. Be ye, too, humble and obedient: if this sceptre and this crown be ever lost again they will be found no more! But see! the wind is fresh upon the waters; you must spread the sail.

Then they both kissed the royal jewels, and the princess took in one hand the white dove, and carried in the other the garments of their early home; the prince bare the glass of life, the sceptre, and the crown; and the old gray man and his aged sister went with them to the shore; Vauvah too, was there, and Zick-Zick also. But the nearer they drew to the sea the more bitter became the thought that they were about to leave for ever the cottage, and their

good old friend, the garden, the goat, the little dog, and all. They thought on the quiet days they had lived there, and it appeared to them as though those poor dumb animals knew they were about to part, for they drooped and looked sad, and did not seek as usual for food.

The children felt very low and full of tears, and when they saw the wide and solitary sea, and remembered the long long voyage they had to perform, they besought the old man and his sister that they, with the goat and the dog, would go with them to their father's house, and live and die there.

But they shook their heads, and said, "Your ways are not our ways; we were born for low degree, you for lofty place; we must end our days here, as your old ancestor did in his native hut."

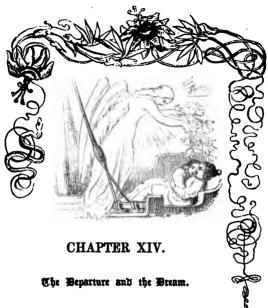
The children were silent for awhile, and then said they, "Canst thou not, dear friend, bring our father hither to dwell on this shore?"

"Nay," said the old man, "this is no seemly

region for a mighty king. Farewell! fulfil your fate; the blessing of GoD be yours! We shall dwell together in heaven!"

They stood by the vessel's side; they looked for the last time on the hut, on Vauvah, Zick-Zick, and that aged dame, and they could not choose but weep bitterly.





THEN the old man lifted them up in the midst of their tears, and put them on board. The breeze freshened and the vessel sped. Sad it was to see how the dog began to moan and move restlessly up and down; and the goat to bound upon a lofty rock, and bleat and look along the sea. The old gray man too,

and his sister, made many a mournful gesture of farewell, and shed the large slow tears of age. The bark meanwhile rushed on. The princess held the silken cord, and the flight of the dove was the guidance of their way. Prince Schreimund took the helm and steered. Often and again they looked back through their tears, on the island shore. In former days they had longed to leave it, but now its very desolation was dear to them, and the poverty and toil of their solitude they longed again to share.

Strong grew the wind and the vessel bounded on. The sun went down upon the waters, and the night swallowed up rock and tree and cottage home for ever. The dove couched down to rest. The children folded their hands together, and prayed that their Father in Heaven would guide them home in peace. Then, sad and weary, and side by side, they slept; cradled in that lonely bark, rocked by the heaving sea. With slumber also came sweet visions of the night. They saw in the dreamy distance

through the darkness of the air, a soft white cloud: slowly it came down from above, until at last it gleamed and rested on the deck. Its shape at the first was as the form of a vast unopened flower: then gently it began to unclose: the leaves divided one by one, until in the bosom, as it were, of the mighty rose, there shone like the morning star, clothed in white garments, a kneeling Angel. Heaven was in his look. A mild and gentle radiance shone around him; a deep and lofty brightness was in his eye; and the light of his presence flashed along the air, and went down into the sea, insomuch that they saw the gliding fishes, and the monsters of the deep, and the pearls of ocean, where they lay.

Then the Angel arose. He held in each hand a lily on her stem, with many a beaming bud. He waved those lilies over the children where they slept, and he chanted at the same time a heavenly psalm.

The tone, the look of that fair Spirit, sunk down into the hearts of the children, as light flows deep within the sea: it was like brightness that might be felt; and whose had seen their faces in that dream, would have perceived thereon a soft and holy smile.

The Angel held once more the lilies above the children of the king, and it seemed to them as though every bud began to unfold, and to become a fountain of flowers: bud, blossom, and leaf, all fragrant, every one fair, flowed in streams from those buds of the lily; and each as it fell appeared to have tones and a voice wherewithal to praise God. A thrilling sense of melody and loveliness overwhelmed their slumbering souls.

Then the Angel lifted up the lilies once more, and they gathered themselves together and closed; and he opened his mouth, and his accents sounded thus:—"Be ye pure; be ye innocent; be ye holy: then shall your thoughts and deeds flow like a river of fragrant flowers into Paradise."

The dream began to fade: the cloud again vailed the Angel from their sight: they

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watched the skies, but he was gone. A sudden shock awoke them, they looked up, and the night was passed: the vessel had touched the shore: they gazed on the land, and they knew that before them lay the green hills of their own country—their native and natural land.





CHAPTER THE LAST.

The Return - The Tree. - The Rod.

GLORIOUS to look upon was that lovely shore; the white waves leaped along the land in their joy with the sunlight in their breast; all was beautiful as May, and their old accustomed flowers greeted the eyes of the children as they moved on their homeward way. Yet the vision of their voyage made by its memory

even that fair scene look common and cold; and they were like men who have gazed entranced on the glories of some pictured chancel, and then have gone forth into the usual streets of every-day life. Silently they went up from the shore, and once they turned to look a last farewell on that ship and the bounding sea; but soon the sunny scenery, the birds, the moths, the flowers, surpassed the remembrance of their dream, and one strong deep thought occupied their souls; they longed for their father and their mother, the pleasance, and the blessed halls of home.

Meanwhile, onward and onward fled the dove, from wood to wood and from hill to hill, until they stood at last by the boundary of roses at their father's gate. But, alas! what a change was there; the ancient oaks were alive, but the wild rose-fence was faded and gone; wild beasts from the forest had broken through, and made that pleasance their lair. Thorns and thistles had grown unchecked, and the fair fountain flowed over a wild and reedy

marsh. Still went they onward, sad and downcast, but with hope and trust in God. The dove could fly no longer free, but she went from tree to tree, and they followed her difficult path through the tangled thicket till they reached an open glade.

Here they paused awhile to rest, and as they looked around them they saw in the distance the dark figure of a man. The dove flew on. They walked towards him with beating hearts, and as they drew more near they perceived that it was indeed a man, who sat in the midst of that wilderness clothed in a mantle of black, his head bent upon his hand, in a posture of hopeless grief. His thin white hair shook with the wind, tears fell upon his beard, and he seemed as one who heeded no longer anything of earth. The children stood still with fear: they knew him not at the first, but when they saw the dove at his side, and a withered chaplet of roses on his head, and a rod in his right hand, they felt at once that it was their father; so they rushed towards his seat, fell down

before him, and lifted up their voices and wept.

The old man stood up, and looked at them long, amazed; he believed not for joy; but when they fell upon his neck and kissed him, his tears of gladness burst forth like a torrent; he held them to his heart, and cried, "My children! O, my children!"

When at length they were somewhat calm, the prince delivered up to his father the long-lost sceptre and crown, and the princess gave him for a gift, the glass of life; but the king heeded them not; he grasped his silver horn, and sounded a clear glad signal far and wide, so that the castle and the city were filled with a sudden delight! The garments of grief were rent away, and they held high festival many days; again the pleasance was cleansed and adorned, and shone with beauty as before.

Now when all things were restored and ready, he called, as at the birth of his children, all his people, high and low, rich and poor, old and young. They came in thousands,

clothed in rich apparel, to the feast, and were welcomed with music and song. They found in the place where in ancient days there stood the hut of the old man of the birch-field, and his tree, a great and golden throne; thereon sat the king! he held his sceptre and he wore his crown. The prince and the princess stood on each side, and around him the nobles of the land.

Every voice was hushed, for the king in a deep and solemn tone began; "Ye all know, good and loving people, how God hath smitten me for my haughtiness and pride; and how He took my children from me to learn humility and obedience in the school of misfortune. His righteous correction bent me to the dust, even as I smote down in my wrath my forefather's tree: the rod of discipline, which I so scorned, myself and my children have been taught to bear. And now God hath given us a gracious change; all hath been for the best; Praise God! Thus, then, in memory of the last wishes of my ancestor, the broom-binder of

the forest, and for the good of those who shall reign in my stead, and their people, in order that the chastisement of God may never be forgotten, from this day our royal shield of arms shall bear a crown of thorny roses and a birchen rod.

"You all heard, good people, my vain and foolish vow at the feast when my children were born, that none should speak of the rod or the broom-binder to my royal race on penalty of death; I repent me of my evil words, and for atonement I will establish a solemn usage in my realm for ever. You know the festival of Christmas-tide; how good and holy is that blessed hour, when the Child Jesus lay in the Manger of Bethlehem, and grew up to be scourged with rods, and to wear for us all a crown of bitter thorns. You remember, also, that our custom is to deck with silver, and gold, and fruit, that night, a shining mimic Tree, in memory of Him!

"Now I ordain that henceforth, whensoever and wheresoever in my castle and my kingdom there shall gleam a Christmas-tree, amidst the lights, and the jewels, and the fruit, there shall be laid a birchen-rod, for a wholesome sign, and a sacred memorial, that our life should be a time of discipline and self-control, of penitence and tears. And for my own lineage and house, lo! I plant here, with my own royal hand, in the place where the tree of my forefathers stood, a fair young sapling of the broom-binder's wood. Woe to him that shall do it harm; may my race flourish or fade like this tree!"

Thus said the king, and as he commanded, so was it done for evermore. Then they that stood by said, "He speaks like Solomon the Wise;" and the words which they heard from his mouth by the grave of his forefathers, they treasured faithfully in their hearts; and from that time forth when the birth-day of Jesus came, there shone no Christmas-tree without its birchen-rod; and when the children asked what it meant, they told them the History of the Prince Schreimund and the Princess

Schweigstilla, the Birchen Sceptre and the Wild-rose Crown.

"Do you understand it?" they said to their youthful hearers; and when they answered, "Yes," then said they, "Heed it well, bear discipline, love kind correction, be dutiful and obey." And the children would promise and remember, and good came every year from the parable of the rod. How long agone these things came to pass is not known, but the custom is manifest, for they keep it holy throughout the nation to this very day!



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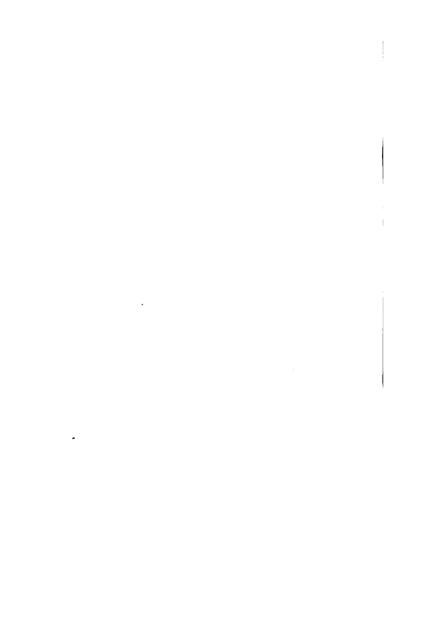
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